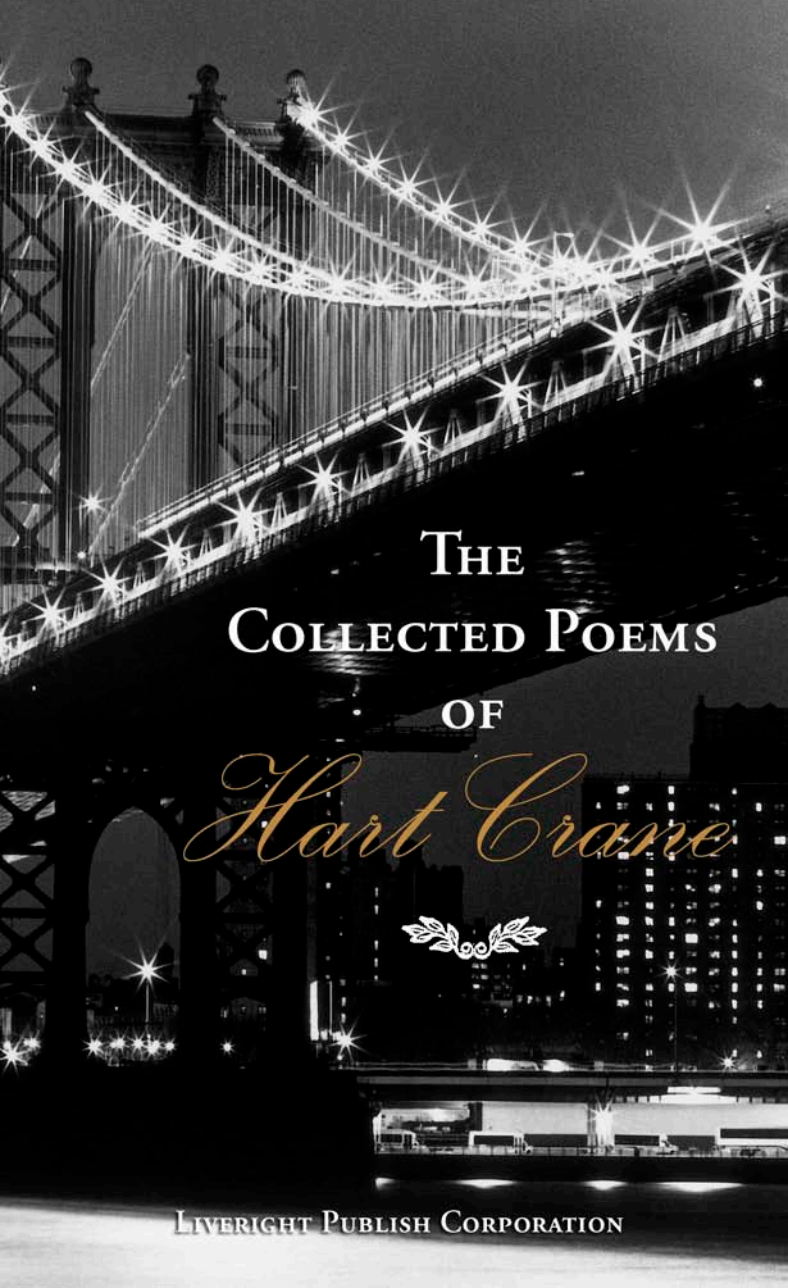
THE
COLLECTED POEMS
OF
Hart Crane
LIVERIGHT PUBLISH CORPORATION

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EDITED WITH
AN INTRODUCTION BY
WALDO FRANK

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THE COLLECTED POEMS OF
HART CRANE

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EDITOR'S NOTE

At the time of his death, Hart Crane had prepared for publication a volume to be called *Key West: An Island Sheaf*. This collection, with the poems as arranged by Crane, figures as Part Three of this volume. The Uncollected Poems were found in manuscript among the poet's papers, and were written for the most part in the last three or four years of his life. Some of them had no title. Many of them, it is clear, are incomplete and were so considered by the poet.

There exist a number of *variora* of certain passages of *The Bridge*, apart from the variations in the Paris edition which appeared a few months before the first New York issue; but the Editor has not judged that the publication of *variora* would be advisable in this first collected edition. The text of *The Bridge* adhered to, is the final one chosen by the poet and published by Liveright, Inc.

The Editor is indebted principally to Mrs. Grace Hart Crane, the poet's mother, and to Mr. Samuel Loveman, for assistance in the preparation of this volume. His thanks are due also to Mr. Malcolm Cowley, Mr. Pat McGrath and Mr. Joseph Kling, former editor of *The Pagan*.

AN INTRODUCTION

I dwell in Possibility
A fairer house than Prose,
More numerous of windows,
Superior of doors.
EMILY DICKINSON

a

AGRARIAN America had a common culture, which was both the fruit and the carrier of what I have called elsewhere "the great tradition." [1] This tradition rose in the Mediterranean world with the will of Egypt, Israel and Greece, to recreate the individual and the group in the image of values called divine. The same will established Catholic Europe, and when it failed (producing nonetheless what came to be the national European cultures), the great tradition survived. It survived in the Europe of Renaissance, Reformation, Revolution. With the Puritans, it was formally transplanted to the North American seaboard. Roger Williams, Thomas Hooker, Jonathan Edwards; later, in a more narrow sense, Jefferson, Madison, Adams, carried on the great tradition, with the same tools, on the same intellectual and economic terms, that had been brought from Europe and that had failed in Europe. It was transplanted, it was not transfigured. But before the final defeat of its Puritan avatar—a defeat ensured by

[1] *The Re-discovery of America.*

the disappearance of our agrarian economy, the great tradition had borne fruit in two general forms. The first was the ideological art of what Lewis Mumford calls the Golden Day: a prophetic art of poets so diverse as Emerson, Thoreau, Poe, whose vision was one of Possibility and whose doom, since its premise was a disappearing world, was to remain suspended in the thin air of aspiration. The second was within the lives of the common people. Acceptance of the ideal of the great tradition had its effect upon their character; and this humbler achievement is recorded, perhaps finally, in the poems of Robert Frost. Frost's art, unlike Whitman's or Melville's, is one of Probability. It gives us not a vision, but *persons*. They are frustrate, poor, often mad. They face grimly their resurgent hills, knowing the failure of their lives to enact the beauty of their great tradition. Yet their dwelling within it for many generations, their acceptance of its will for their own, has given them even in defeat a fibre of strength, a smoldering spark of victory; and it is this in the verse of Frost that makes it poetry of a high order.

Frost's record (*North of Boston*, 1914; *Mountain Interval*, 1916) was already made when the United States entered the War; and the War brought final ruin to the American culture of "free" individuals living for the most part on farms, whose beauty Frost recorded. The tradition which had tempered the persons in Frost's poems had already, before the Civil War, sung its last high Word in the old terms that were valid from Plato to Fichte. And

this too was fitting, for the Civil War prepared the doom which the World War completed, of our agrarian class-culture. But the great tradition, unbroken from Hermes Trismegistus and Moses, does not die. In a society transfigured by new scientific and economic forces, it too must be transfigured. The literature and philosophy of the past hundred years reveal many efforts at this transfiguration: in this common purpose, Marx and Nietzsche are brothers. The poetry of Whitman was still founded on the substances of the old order. The poetry of Hart Crane is a deliberate continuance of the great tradition in terms of our industrialised world.

If we bear in mind this purpose of Crane's work, we shall be better prepared to understand his methods, his content, his obscurity. We shall, of course, not seek the clear forms of a poet of Probability, like Frost. But we shall, also, not too widely trust Crane's kinship with the poets of the Emersonian era, whose tradition he immediately continues. They were all, like Crane, bards of Possibility rather than scribes of realisation. Yet they relied upon inherited forms . . . forms emotional, ethical, social, intellectual and religious, transplanted from Europe and not too deliquescent for their uses. Whitman's apocalypse rested on the politics of Jefferson and on the economics of the physiocrats of France. Emerson was content with the ideology of Plato and Buddha, his own class world not too radically differing from theirs. Even Emily Dickinson based her explosive doubts upon the permanent premise of

a sheltered private garden, to which such as she could always meditatively retire. These conventional assumptions gave to these poets an accessible and communicable form; for we too have been nurtured on the words of that old order. But in Crane, none of the ideal landmarks, none of the formal securities, survive; therefore his language problem—the poet's need to find words at once to create and to communicate his vision—is acute. Crane, who began to write while Frost was perfecting his story, lived, instinctively at first, then with poignant awareness, in a world whose cant outlines of person, class, creed, value—still clear, however weak, in Emerson's Boston, Whitman's New York, Poe's Richmond—had dissolved. His vision was the timeless One of all the seers, and it binds him to the great tradition; but because of the time that fleshed him and that he needed, to substance his vision, he could not employ traditional concretions. He began, naked and brave, in a cultural chaos; and his attempt, with sound materials, to achieve poetic form, was ever close to chaos. What is clear in Crane, besides the intensity and the traditionalism of his creative will, is the impact of inchoate forces through which he rose to utterance. Cities, machines, the warring hungers of lonely and herded men, the passions released from defeated loyalties, were ever near to overwhelm the poet. To master them, he must form his Word unaided. In his lack of valid terms to express his relationship with life, Crane was a true culture-child; more completely than either Emily Dickinson or Blake, he was a child of modern man.

b

HAROLD HART CRANE was born in Garrettsville, Ohio, July 21, 1899. His parents, Clarence Arthur Crane and Grace Hart, were of the pioneer stock that trekked in covered wagons from New England to the Western Reserve. But his grandparents, on both sides, had already shifted from the farm to small town business; and Clarence A. Crane became a wealthy candy manufacturer in Cleveland. Here, the poet, an only child, lived from his tenth year. At thirteen, he was composing verse; at sixteen, in the words of Gorham Munson,[1] "he was writing on a level that Amy Lowell never rose from." In the winter of 1916, he went with his mother, who soon separated from her husband, to the Isle of Pines, south of Cuba, where his grandfather Hart had a fruit ranch; and this journey, which gave him his first experience of the sea, was cardinal in his growth. The following year, he was in New York; in contact with Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap, editors of *The Little Review;* tutoring for college; writing; already passionately and rather wildly living. At this time, two almost mutually exclusive tendencies divided the American literary scene. One was centered by Ezra Pound, Alfred Kreymborg, the imagists, Harriet Monroe's *Poetry* and *The Little Review;* the other was grouped about *The Seven Arts.* Young Crane was in vital touch with both. He was reading Marlowe, Donne, Rimbaud, Laforgue; but he was also finding in-

[1] *Destinations,* 1928. The essay in this volume on Crane, written in 1925, is, so far as I know, the first important study of the poet.

spiration in Whitman, Sherwood Anderson and Melville. His action, when the United States lurched into war, reveals the complexity of his interests. He decided not to go to college, and by his own choice, returned to Cleveland, to work as a common laborer in a munition plant and a shipyard on the Lake. He loved machines, the earth-tang of the workers. He was no poet in an ivory tower. But he also loved music; he wanted time to write, to meditate, to read. The conflict of desires led him, perhaps, to accept what seemed a comfortable compromise; a job in the candy business of his father where he hoped to find some leisure without losing contact with the industrial world.

The elder Crane seems to have been a man of turbulent and twisted power, tough-fibred and wholly loyal to the gods of Commerce. He was sincerely outraged by the jest of fortune which had given him a poet for a son. Doubtless, he was bitter at his one child's siding with the mother in the family conflict; but under all, there was a secret emotional bond between the two, making for the ricochet of antagonism and attraction that lasted between them until the father's death, a year before the poet's. The candy magnate set to work to drive the "poetry nonsense" out of his boy. Hart became a candy salesman behind a counter, a soda-jerker, a shipping clerk. He received a minimum wage. Trusted employees were detailed to spy on him lest he read "poetry books" during work hours. Hart Crane escaped several times from the paternal yoke, usually to advertising jobs near home or in New York.

And at last, in 1920, he decided to break with both Cleveland and his father.

His exquisite balance of nerves was already permanently impaired. The youthful poet, who had left a comfortable household to live with machines and rough men, who had shouldered "the curse of sundered parentage," [1] who had tasted the strong drink of literature and war, carried within him a burden intricate and heavy, a burden hard to hold in equilibrium. Doubtless, the chaos of his personal life led him to rationalise that accessible tangent ease from the strain of balance, which excess use of alcohol invited. Yet there was a deeper cause for the dis-equilibrium which, when Crane was thirty-two, was finally to break him from his love of life and destroy him.

Crane was a mystic. The mystic is a man who *knows*, by immediate experience, the organic continuity between his self and the cosmos. This experience, which is the normal fruit of sensitivity, becomes intense in a man whose native energy is great; and lest it turn into an overwhelming, shattering burden, it must be ruthlessly disciplined and ordered. The easiest defense from this mystic burden is of course the common one of denying the mystic experience altogether. An anti-mystical age like ours is simply one so innerly resourceless that it solves, by negation and aggressive repression, the problem of organic continuity between the self and a seemingly chaotic world—thus perpetuating the inward-and-outward chaos. The true solution

[1] *The Bridge.*

is too arduous for most men: by self-knowledge and self-discipline, it is to achieve within one's self a stable nucleus to bear and finally transfigure the world's impinging chaos. For the nucleus within the self, as it is gradually revealed, is impersonal and cosmic; is indeed the dynamic key to order in the "outward" world. By this synthesis of his own burden, the mystic escapes from destruction and becomes a master. Crane did not personally achieve it. Yet he was too virile to deny the experience of continuity; he let the world pour in; and since his nuclear self was not disciplined to detachment from his nerves and passions, he lived exacerbated in a constant swing between ecstasy and exhaustion. Therefore, he needed the tangent release of excess drink and sexual indulgence.

The poet was clearer and shrewder than the man. His mind, grown strong, sought a poetic principle to integrate the exuberant flood of his impressions. The important poems, anterior to *The Bridge*, and written between his nineteenth and his twenty-fifth year, reveal this quest but not the finding. As Allen Tate points out in his Introduction to *White Buildings* (1926), "a suitable theme" is lacking. The themes of these poems are high enough. But, to quote Mr. Tate again: "A series of Imagist poems is a series of worlds. The poems of Hart Crane are facets of a single vision; they refer to a central imagination, a single evaluating power, which is at once the motive of the poetry and the form of its realisation." This central imagination, wanting the unitary principle or theme, wavers and breaks;

turns back upon itself instead of mastering the envisaged substance of the poem. That is why, in this first group, a fragmentary part of a poem is sometimes greater than the whole. And that is why it is at times impossible to transpose a series of images into the sense- and thought-sequence that originally moved the poet and that must be perceived in order to move the reader. The mediate principle, coterminous with both the absolute image-logic of the poem and the thought-logic of the poet, and illumining the latter in the former, is imperfect. The first lines of his *White Buildings*

> *As silent as a mirror is believed*
> *Realities plunge in silence by . . .*

are a superb expression of chaos, and of the poet's need to integrate this chaos within the active mirror of self. Page after page, "realities plunge by," only ephemerally framed in a mirroring mood which alas! at once melts, itself, into the turbulent procession. Objective reality exists in these poems only as an oblique moving-inward to the poet's mood. But the mood is never, as in imagist or romantic verse, given for and as itself. It is given only as a moving-outward toward the objective world. Each lyric is a diapason between two integers of a continuous one. But the integers (subjective and objective) are almost never clear; the sole clarity is the balance of antithetical movements. This makes of the poem an abstract, wavering, æsthetic body. There is not yet, as in the later work, a conscious, substantiated

theme or principle of vision to stratify the interacting parts of the poem into an immobile whole. But in the final six lyrics (*Voyages*) there is the beginning of a synthesis attained by the symbolic use of the Sea. The turbulent experiences of Crane's childhood and youth are merged into a litany of the Sea.

You must not cross nor ever trust beyond it
Spry cordage of your bodies to caresses
Too lichen-faithful from too wide a breast.
The bottom of the sea is cruel.

—And yet this great wink of eternity,
Of rimless floods, unfettered leewardings,
Samite sheeted and processioned where
Her undinal vast belly moonward bends,
Laughing the rapt inflections of our love;

Take this Sea, whose diapason knells
On scrolls of silver snowy sentences,
The sceptred terror of whose sessions rends
As her demeanors motion well or ill,
All but the pieties of lovers' hands.

Here is the Sea, objective, huge, hostile, encompassing, maternal.

—As if too brittle or too clear to touch!
The cables of our sleep so swiftly filed,
Already hang, shred ends from remembered stars.
One frozen, trackless smile . . . What words
Can strangle this deaf moonlight? For we

Are overtaken. Now no cry, no sword
Can fasten or deflect this tidal wedge,
Slow tyranny of moonlight, moonlight loved
And changed....

And

...Blue latitudes and levels of your eyes,—

here, as William Carlos Williams has noted, is the Sea giving to the poet's love its rhythm and very substance.

Crane is using the symbol of the Sea as a principle of unity and release from the contradictions of personal existence; much as D. H. Lawrence used the symbol of perfect sexual union. Both, as poetic instruments for solving the mystic's burden, are romantic and unreal; both denote a return to a "beginning" before the life of reason, and a unity won by the refusal of human consciousness. Lawrence was satisfied with his symbol. Not Crane. His intellect was more robust, his art more rigorous. Crane knew the Sea—source of life, first Mother—as death to man; and that to woo it was death. *White Buildings* closes on the note of surrender. But the poet is ready to begin his quest again for a theme that shall integrate, not destroy, the multiple human world he loves.

In 1924, the poems of *White Buildings* written but unpublished, Crane was living at 110 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, in range of the Harbor, the Bridge, the sea-sounds:

Gongs in white surplices, beshrouded wails,
Far strum of fog horns....

And now the integrating theme came to him. By the fall of 1925, he had achieved the pattern of his Poem. He was working as a writer of advertising copy. He appealed successfully to Otto H. Kahn (his father, after he left Cleveland, gave him no financial assistance until the last years when his son's fame began to impress him); and with a generous purse he went to the Isle of Pines; then to Paris, Marseilles, writing and—at intervals—rather riotously living. The Poem was completed in December, 1929. In the interim, Crane had learned that the house where the vision of *The Bridge* first came to him and where he finished it, was once the property of Washington Roebling, and that the very room in which Crane lived had been employed by the paralysed engineer of Brooklyn Bridge as an observation tower to watch its construction. In the year when Crane first found his theme, Lewis Mumford was prophetically writing:

"... beyond any other aspect of New York, I think, the Brooklyn Bridge has been a source of joy and inspiration to the artist.... All that the age had just cause for pride in—its advances in science, its skill in handling iron, its personal heroism in the face of dangerous industrial processes, its willingness to attempt the untried and the impossible—came to a head in the Brooklyn Bridge."[1]

The Bridge was published in April, 1930 (a limited first edition, inscribed to Otto H. Kahn, was issued earlier in Paris by the Black Sun Press). In 1931, Crane received

[1] *Sticks and Stones.*

a fellowship from the Guggenheim Foundation, and went to Mexico; his plan being to write a poem on the history of Montezuma, a variation on the American theme which *The Bridge* stated.

The principle that Hart Crane had sought, to make him master of his sense of immediate continuity with a world overwhelmingly chaotic, gave him *The Bridge.* But in actual life, it did not sustain him. He had a literary method to apply the principle to his vision; he had no psychological method to apply it to his person. The symbol of the Sea —theme of retreat into the unity of immersion and of dissolution—still bespoke him, as it had finally bespoken the love experience in *White Buildings. The Bridge,* with its challenging synthesis of life, wherein all the modern multiverse is accepted and transfigured without loss into One, could not hold its poet. The poems later than *The Bridge,* despite their technical perfection, mark a retreat from the high position of that Poem back to the mood of *White Buildings*—a return from grappling with the elements of the industrial world back to the primal Mother world whose symbol is the tropic Sea.

It was not accidental that Crane's tender friendships were with boys who followed the Sea. And drink was the Sea's coadjutor; for it gave Crane release not, as with most men, from the burden of *separateness* from life, but from the more intolerable burden of *continuity* with life's chaos. The Sea had ebbed, while he stood high above it on his mythic Bridge; now again it was rising.

Here waves climb into dusk on gleaming mail;
Invisible valves of the sea—locks, tendons
Crested and creeping, troughing corridors . . .

Nor was it accidental that Crane now chose to go to Mexico, where for a thousand years a cult of Death—personal immolation in a Nature ruthless and terrible as the Sea—has been practiced by a folk of genius.

While Crane sailed to Mexico, I was writing:

"Perhaps the earth of Mexico conspired to create the tragic mood of the Aztec, and to fulfill it in the Conquest from which modern Mexico was born. It is an earth unwieldy to man's pleasure. Titanic and volcanic mountains, mesetas of thin air, exuberant valleys, burning deserts, encourage a culture not smiling but extreme, from tears to frenzied laughter. This earth is a tyrant; it exiles valley from valley, it begrudges loam for corn or overwhelms it with torrential rains. Man is a stranger within it, and yet he loves it like a goddess, radiant, cruel, suddenly indulgent, in whose house he must serve forever. It is no mystery that in such an earth man should have built temples of blood or possessed his life in contemplation of a loveliness deadly as fire and distant as the stars.

"But this man was still man. In a hostile and adorable world, man's and woman's love of life breathed on. . . ." [1]

The second paragraph refers to the Mexico of Revolution—"the will of Mexico to be free of its death and of a beauty that flowers in death"; the first describes the Mexico that now possessed Hart Crane. The periodicity of his excesses grew swifter; the crystal intervening times when he could write were crowded out. Crane fought death

[1] *America Hispana.*

in Mexico. But on his return to New York, to the modern chaos, there was the Sea: and he could not resist it.

On April 27, 1932, a few moments before noon, he walked to the stern of the *Orizaba*. The boat was about three hundred miles north of Havana, leaving the warm waters which fifteen years before he had first known. He took off his coat, quietly, and leaped.

c

THE beauty of most of Crane's lyrics and of many passages in *The Bridge* seems to me to be inviolable. If I begin to analyse this conviction, I am brought first to the poetic texture. Its traditional base is complex. Here is a music plainly related to the Elizabethans. And here, also, is a sturdy lilt, like the march of those equal children of the Elizabethans—the pioneers. Although Crane describes a modern cabaret,

> *Brazen hypnotics glitter here;*
> *Glee shifts from foot to foot...*

always, there is this homely metronomic, linking him to his fathers. Hence the organic soundness of the verse. Its livingness it owes to the dimension of variant emergence from the traditional music—like the emergence of our industrial world from the base of old America. Indeed, the entire intellectual and spiritual content of Crane's verse, and of Crane the child of modern man, could be

derived from a study of his typical texture. And this is earnest of his importance.

But an analysis of Crane's poetics does not belong in a brief introduction. More fitting, perhaps, will be a swift outline of the action of *The Bridge,* if it help the reader to give his whole attention at once to that Poem's inner substance.

The will of Crane in *The Bridge* becomes deliberately myth-making. But this will, as we have seen, is born of a desperate, personal need: the poet *must* create order from the chaos with which his associative genius overwhelms him. The Poem retains the personal origin of its own will. The revelation of *The Bridge,* as myth and principle, comes to a person in the course of his day's business; and that person is the poet. In this sense, *The Bridge* is allied to the *Commedia* of Dante who also, in response to desperate need, takes a journey in the course of which his need finds consummation.

Lest the analogy be misleading, I immediately amend it. Dante's cosmos, imaged in an age of cultural maturity, when the life of man was coterminous with his vision, contains Time and persons: only in the ecstatic last scenes of the *Paradiso* are they momently merged and lost. Therefore, the line of Dante's Poem is always clear, being forth and back in Time: and the focus of the action is always cogent, being the person of the Poet with whom the reader can readily graph points of reference. Crane's cosmos (for reasons which we examined when we called Crane a

child of modern man, a poet innocent of culture-words) has no Time: and his person-sense is vacillant and evanescent. Crane's journey is that of an individual unsure of his own form and lost to Time. This difference at once clarifies the disadvantageous æsthetic of *The Bridge,* as compared with that of broadly analogous Poems of cosmic search, like the *Commedia* or *Don Quixote.* It exemplifies the rôle played by the cultural epoch in the creation of even the most personal work of genius.

In *Proem,* the poet exhorts the object of his choice—the Bridge. It shall synthesise the world of chaos. It joins city, river, and sea; man made it with his new Hand, the machine. And parabolawise, it shall now vault the continent and, transmuted, reach that inward heaven which is the fulfillment of man's need of order. Part One, *Ave Maria,* is the vision of Columbus, mystic navigator who mapped his voyage in Isaiah, seeking to weld the world's riven halves into one. But this Columbus is scarcely a person; he is suffused in his history and his ocean; his will is more substantial than his eye. Nor does he live in Time. Part Two, *Powhatan's Daughter* (the Indian Princess is the flesh of America, the American earth, and mother of our dream), begins the recital of the poet's journey which in turn traces in extension (as Columbus in essence) the myth's trajectory. The poet awakes in his room above the Harbor, beside his lover. Risen (taking the harbor and the sea-sounds with him), he walks through the lowly Brooklyn streets: but walks with his cultural

past: Pizarro, Cortés, Priscilla, and now Rip Van Winkle whose eyes, fresh from sleep, will abide the poet's as they approach the transfigured world of today. He descends the subway that tunnels the East River (the Bridge is above); and now the subway is a river "leaping" from Far Rockaway to Golden Gate. A river of steel rails at first, bearing westward America's urban civilisation ("Stick your patent name on a signboard") and waking as it runs the burdened trudge of pioneers and all their worlds of factory and song. The patterning march of the American settlers traces the body, gradually, of Pocahontas; the flow of continent and man becomes the Great River; the huge travail of continental life, after the white man and before him, is borne southward, "meeting the Gulf." Powhatan's daughter, America's flesh, dances and the flesh becomes spirit. Dances the poet's boyhood memories of star and lake, of "sleek boat nibbling margin grass"; dances at last into the life of an Indiana mother, home from a frustrate trek to California for gold, who is bidding her son farewell; he is going east again to follow the sea. ("Write me from Rio.")

There are no persons in the universe, barely emergent from chaos, of Hart Crane; and this first crystallisation—the prairie mother—is the first weak block in the Poem's structure. Now, with Part Three, *Cutty Sark*, the physical course of the poet (the subway ride has exploded into the cosmic implications of the River) returns to view, but blurred. The poet is in South Street, Manhattan, near mid-

night: he is carousing with a sailor who brings him, in snatches of song, Leviathan, Plato, Stamboul—and the dim harbinger of Atlantis. "I started walking home across the Bridge"; and there, in the hallucinatory parade of clippers who once winked round the Horn "bright sky-sails ticketing the Line," the poet is out again, now seaward.

Part Four, *Cape Hatteras*, is the turning point of the Poem. Thus far, we have seen the individual forms of the poet's crowded day melt into widening, deepening cycles of association. Columbus into the destiny and will of the Atlantic: two lovers into the harbor, the harbor into the sea: a subway into a transcontinental railroad, into a continent, into a River; the River into the Gulf; the Indian princess into the Earth Mother and her dance into the tumult and traffic of the nation; ribald South Street into a vision—while the Bridge brings the clippers that bring China—of Atlantis. Now, the movement turns back toward crystallisation. *Cape Hatteras* at first invokes the geologic age that lifted the Appalachians above the waters; the cosmic struggle sharpens into the birth of the airplane—industrial America; the "red, eternal flesh of Pocahontas" gives us, finally, Walt Whitman. "Years of the Modern! Propulsions toward what capes?" The Saunterer on the Open Road takes the hand of the poet. Part Five, *Three Songs*, is a pause for humbler music, upon the variable theme of woman. Part Six, *Quaker Hill*, is an attempt to focus the cosmic journey once more upon

the person of the poet. In my judgment, it fails for the same basic reasons. And now, Part Seven, *The Tunnel*, runs swift and fatefully to the climax. The poet, in mid air at midnight, leaves the Bridge; he "comes down to earth" and returns home as he had left, by subway. This unreal collapse of bridge into subway has meaning. The subway is the tunnel; is the whole life of the city entextured of all the images created by the Poem, all the previous apparitions of earth and sun. The tunnel is America, and is a kind of hell. But it has dynamic direction, it is moving! In the plunging subway darkness, appears Poe:

> *And why do I often meet your visage here,*
> *Your eyes like agate lanterns . . . ?*

If the reader understands Poe, he will understand the apparition. Of all the classic poets of the great tradition in America, Poe—perhaps the least as artist—was the most advanced, the most prophetic as thinker. All, as we have noted, were content more or less with the merely transplanted terms of an agrarian culture. Only Poe guessed the transfiguring effect of the Machine upon the forms of human life, upon the very concept of the person. The Tunnel gives us man in his industrial hell which the machine—his hand and heart—has made; now let the machine be his godlike Hand to uplift him! The plunging subway shall merge with the vaulting bridge. Whitman gives the vision; Poe, however vaguely, the method. The

final part, *Atlantis,* is a transposed return to the beginning. The Bridge, in Time, has linked Atlantis with Cathay. Now it becomes an absolute experience. Like any human event, *fully known,* it links man instantaneously, "beyond time," with the Truth.

d

THE structural pattern of *The Bridge* is superb: a man moves of a morning from Brooklyn to Manhattan, returns at midnight, each stage of his course adumbrating, by the mystic law of continuity, into American figures with cosmic overtones; and all caught up in a mythic bridge whose functional span is a parabola and an immediate act of vision. The flaw lies in the weakness of the personal crystallisation upon which the vision rests, as the Bridge is spanned upon its piers. This flaw gets into the idiom and texture. Sometimes the image blurs, the sequence breaks, the plethora of words is blinding. There is even, in the development of certain figures, a tendency toward inflation which one is tempted to connect with the febrile, false ebullience of the American epoch (1924-1929) in which the Poem was written. Yet the concept is sound; the poet's genius has on the whole equalled his ambition. Even the failings in execution, since they are due to weakness of the personal focus, help to express the epoch; for it is in the understanding and creating of *persons* that our rapidly collectivising age is poorest.

Crane's myth must, of course, not be confused with the myth as we find it in Homer or the Bible or the Nibelungen. The Bridge is not a particularised being to be popularly sung; it is a conceptual symbol to be *used.* And the fact that this symbol begins as a man-constructed thing is of the essence of its truth for our instrumental age. From a machine-made entity, the Poem makes the Bridge into a machine. But it has beauty. This means that through the men who builded it, the life of America has flowed into the Bridge—the life of our past *and our future.* A cosmic content has given beauty to the Bridge; now it must give it a poetic function. From being a machine of body, it becomes an instrument of spirit. *The Bridge is matter made into human action.*

We may confidently say that this message of *The Bridge* will be more comprehensible in the future (not in the immediate future), when the functionally limited materialism of our collectivist era has, through success, grown inadequate to the deepened needs of a mankind released from economic insecurity and prepared, by leisure, for regeneration. For even as necessity, today and tomorrow, drives most men to think collectively in order that they may survive; necessity, day after tomorrow, will drive men to think personally (poetically, cosmically), in order that their survival may have meaning. When the collectivist era has done its work—the abolition of economic classes and of animal want—men will turn, as only

the privileged of the past could ever turn, toward the discovery of Man.

But when that time comes, the message of *The Bridge* will be taken for granted; it will be too obvious, even as today it is too obscure, for general interest. The revelation in Crane's poems, however, of a man who through the immediate conduit of his senses experienced the organic unity between his self, the objective world, and the cosmos, will be accepted as a great human value. And the poems, whose very texture reveals and sings this man, will be remembered.

WALDO FRANK

New York, December 1932

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ONE · THE BRIDGE

From going to and fro in the earth,
and from walking up and down in it.

THE BOOK OF JOB

TO BROOKLYN BRIDGE

How many dawns, chill from his rippling rest
The seagull's wings shall dip and pivot him,
Shedding white rings of tumult, building high
Over the chained bay waters Liberty —

Then, with inviolate curve, forsake our eyes
As apparitional as sails that cross
Some page of figures to be filed away;
— Till elevators drop us from our day . . .

I think of cinemas, panoramic sleights
With multitudes bent toward some flashing scene
Never disclosed, but hastened to again,
Foretold to other eyes on the same screen;

And Thee, across the harbor, silver-paced
As though the sun took step of thee, yet left
Some motion ever unspent in thy stride,—
Implicitly thy freedom staying thee!

Out of some subway scuttle, cell or loft
A bedlamite speeds to thy parapets,
Tilting there momently, shrill shirt ballooning,
A jest falls from the speechless caravan.

Down Wall, from girder into street noon leaks,
A rip-tooth of the sky's acetylene;
All afternoon the cloud-flown derricks turn . . .
Thy cables breathe the North Atlantic still.

And obscure as that heaven of the Jews,
Thy guerdon . . . Accolade thou dost bestow
Of anonymity time cannot raise:
Vibrant reprieve and pardon thou dost show.

O harp and altar, of the fury fused,
(How could mere toil align thy choiring strings!)
Terrific threshold of the prophet's pledge,
Prayer of pariah, and the lover's cry,—

Again the traffic lights that skim thy swift
Unfractioned idiom, immaculate sigh of stars,
Beading thy path — condense eternity:
And we have seen night lifted in thine arms.

Under thy shadow by the piers I waited;
Only in darkness is thy shadow clear.
The City's fiery parcels all undone,
Already snow submerges an iron year . . .

O Sleepless as the river under thee,
Vaulting the sea, the prairies' dreaming sod,
Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend
And of the curveship lend a myth to God.

I

AVE MARIA

Venient annis, sæcula seris,
Quibus Oceanus vincula rerum
Laxet et ingens pateat tellus
Tiphysque novos detegat orbes
Nec sit terris ultima Thule.
—SENECA

BE with me, Luis de San Angel, now—
Witness before the tides can wrest away
The word I bring, O you who reined my suit
Into the Queen's great heart that doubtful day;
For I have seen now what no perjured breath
Of clown nor sage can riddle or gainsay; —
To you, too, Juan Perez, whose counsel fear
And greed adjourned,— I bring you back Cathay!

Here waves climb into dusk on gleaming mail;
Invisible valves of the sea,— locks, tendons
Crested and creeping, troughing corridors
That fall back yawning to another plunge.
Slowly the sun's red caravel drops light
Once more behind us. . . . It is morning there —
O where our Indian emperies lie revealed,
Yet lost, all, let this keel one instant yield!

I thought of Genoa; and this truth, now proved,
That made me exile in her streets, stood me

More absolute than ever — biding the moon
Till dawn should clear that dim frontier, first seen
— The Chan's great continent. . . . Then faith, not fear
Nigh surged me witless. . . . Hearing the surf near —
I, wonder-breathing, kept the watch,— saw
The first palm chevron the first lighted hill.

And lowered. And they came out to us crying,
"The Great White Birds!" (O Madre Maria, still
One ship of these thou grantest safe returning;
Assure us through thy mantle's ageless blue!)
And record of more, floating in a casque,
Was tumbled from us under bare poles scudding;
And later hurricanes may claim more pawn. . . .
For here between two worlds, another, harsh,

This third, of water, tests the word; lo, here
Bewilderment and mutiny heap whelming
Laughter, and shadow cuts sleep from the heart
Almost as though the Moor's flung scimitar
Found more than flesh to fathom in its fall.
Yet under tempest-lash and surfeitings
Some inmost sob, half-heard, dissuades the abyss,
Merges the wind in measure to the waves,

Series on series, infinite,— till eyes
Starved wide on blackened tides, accrete — enclose
This turning rondure whole, this crescent ring
Sun-cusped and zoned with modulated fire
Like pearls that whisper through the Doge's hands

— Yet no delirium of jewels! O Fernando,
Take of that eastern shore, this western sea,
Yet yield thy God's, thy Virgin's charity!

— Rush down the plenitude, and you shall see
Isaiah counting famine on this lee!

*

An herb, a stray branch among salty teeth,
The jellied weeds that drag the shore,— perhaps
Tomorrow's moon will grant us Saltes Bar —
Palos again,— a land cleared of long war.
Some Angelus environs the cordage tree;
Dark waters onward shake the dark prow free.

*

O Thou who sleepest on Thyself, apart
Like ocean athwart lanes of death and birth,
And all the eddying breath between dost search
Cruelly with love thy parable of man,—
Inquisitor! incognizable Word
Of Eden and the enchained Sepulchre,
Into thy steep savannahs, burning blue,
Utter to loneliness the sail is true.

Who grindest oar, and arguing the mast
Subscribest holocaust of ships, O Thou
Within whose primal scan consummately
The glistening seignories of Ganges swim;—
Who sendest greeting by the corposant,

And Teneriffe's garnet — flamed it in a cloud,
Urging through night our passage to the Chan;—
Te Deum laudamus, for thy teeming span!

Of all that amplitude that time explores,
A needle in the sight, suspended north,—
Yielding by inference and discard, faith
And true appointment from the hidden shoal:
This disposition that thy night relates
From Moon to Saturn in one sapphire wheel:
The orbic wake of thy once whirling feet,
Elohim, still I hear thy sounding heel!

White toil of heaven's cordons, mustering
In holy rings all sails charged to the far
Hushed gleaming fields and pendant seething wheat
Of knowledge,— round thy brows unhooded now
— The kindled Crown! acceded of the poles
And biassed by full sails, meridians reel
Thy purpose — still one shore beyond desire!
The sea's green crying towers a-sway, Beyond

And kingdoms
naked in the
trembling heart —
Te Deum laudamus
O Thou Hand of Fire

II

POWHATAN'S DAUGHTER

"— Pocahuntus, a well-featured but wanton yong girle... of the age of eleven or twelve years, get the boyes forth with her into the market place, and make them wheele, falling on their hands, turning their heels upwards, whom she would followe, and wheele so herself, naked as she was, all the fort over."

THE HARBOR DAWN

INSISTENTLY through sleep — a tide of voices —
They meet you listening midway in your dream,
The long, tired sounds, fog-insulated noises:
Gongs in white surplices, beshrouded wails,
Far strum of fog horns . . . signals dispersed in veils.

And then a truck will lumber past the wharves
As winch engines begin throbbing on some deck;
Or a drunken stevedore's howl and thud below
Comes echoing alley-upward through dim snow.

And if they take your sleep away sometimes
They give it back again. Soft sleeves of sound
Attend the darkling harbor, the pillowed bay;
Somewhere out there in blankness steam

Spills into steam, and wanders, washed away
— Flurried by keen fifings, eddied

Among distant chiming buoys — adrift. The sky,
Cool feathery fold, suspends, distills
This wavering slumber. . . . Slowly —
Immemorially the window, the half-covered chair,
Ask nothing but this sheath of pallid air.

And you beside me, blessèd now while sirens
Sing to us, stealthily weave us into day —
Serenely now, before day claims our eyes
Your cool arms murmurously about me lay.

While myriad snowy hands are clustering at the panes —

your hands within my hands are deeds;
my tongue upon your throat — singing
arms close; eyes wide, undoubtful
dark
drink the dawn —
a forest shudders in your hair!

The window goes blond slowly. Frostily clears.
From Cyclopean towers across Manhattan waters
— Two — three bright window-eyes aglitter, disk
The sun, released — aloft with cold gulls hither.

The fog leans one last moment on the sill.
Under the mistletoe of dreams, a star —
As though to join us at some distant hill —
Turns in the waking west and goes to sleep.

VAN WINKLE

MACADAM, gun-grey as the tunny's belt,
Leaps from Far Rockaway to Golden Gate:
Listen! the miles a hurdy-gurdy grinds —
Down gold arpeggios mile on mile unwinds.

Times earlier, when you hurried off to school
— It is the same hour though a later day —
You walked with Pizarro in a copybook,
And Cortez rode up, reining tautly in —
Firmly as coffee grips the taste,— and away!

There was Priscilla's cheek close in the wind,
And Captain Smith, all beard and certainty,
And Rip Van Winkle bowing by the way,—
"Is this Sleepy Hollow, friend —?" And he —

And Rip forgot the office hours,
and he forgot the pay;
Van Winkle sweeps a tenement
way down on Avenue A,-

The grind-organ says . . . Remember, remember
The cinder pile at the end of the backyard
Where we stoned the family of young
Garter snakes under . . . And the monoplanes
We launched — with paper wings and twisted
Rubber bands . . . Recall — recall

the rapid tongues
That flittered from under the ash heap day
After day whenever your stick discovered
Some sunning inch of unsuspecting fibre —
It flashed back at your thrust, as clean as fire.

And Rip was slowly made aware
that he, Van Winkle, was not here
nor there. He woke and swore he'd seen Broadway
a Catskill daisy chain in May —

So memory, that strikes a rhyme out of a box
Or splits a random smell of flowers through glass —
Is it the whip stripped from the lilac tree
One day in spring my father took to me,
Or is it the Sabbatical, unconscious smile
My mother almost brought me once from church
And once only, as I recall —?

It flickered through the snow screen, blindly
It forsook her at the doorway, it was gone
Before I had left the window. It
Did not return with the kiss in the hall.

Macadam, gun-grey as the tunny's belt,
Leaps from Far Rockaway to Golden Gate. . . .
Keep hold of that nickel for car-change, Rip,—
Have you got your *"Times"*—?
And hurry along, Van Winkle — it's getting late!

THE RIVER

STICK your patent name on a signboard
brother — all over — going west — young man
Tintex — Japalac — Certain-teed Overalls ads
and lands sakes! under the new playbill ripped
in the guaranteed corner — see Bert Williams what?
Minstrels when you steal a chicken just
save me the wing for if it isn't
Erie it ain't for miles around a
Mazda — and the telegraphic night coming on Thomas

a Ediford — and whistling down the tracks
a headlight rushing with the sound — can you
imagine — while an EXpress makes time like
SCIENCE — COMMERCE and the HOLYGHOST
RADIO ROARS IN EVERY HOME WE HAVE THE NORTHPOLE
WALLSTREET AND VIRGINBIRTH WITHOUT STONES OR
WIRES OR EVEN RUNning brooks connecting ears
and no more sermons windows flashing roar
Breathtaking — as you like it . . . eh?

So the 20th Century — so
whizzed the Limited — roared by and left
three men, still hungry on the tracks, ploddingly
watching the tail lights wizen and converge, slipping gimleted and neatly out of sight.

*

The last bear, shot drinking in the Dakotas
Loped under wires that span the mountain stream.
Keen instruments, strung to a vast precision
Bind town to town and dream to ticking dream.
But some men take their liquor slow — and count
— Though they'll confess no rosary nor clue —
The river's minute by the far brook's year.
Under a world of whistles, wires and steam
Caboose-like they go ruminating through
Ohio, Indiana — blind baggage —
To Cheyenne tagging . . . Maybe Kalamazoo.

Time's rendings, time's blendings they construe
As final reckonings of fire and snow;
Strange bird-wit, like the elemental gist
Of unwalled winds they offer, singing low
My Old Kentucky Home and *Casey Jones,*
Some Sunny Day. I heard a road-gang chanting so.
And afterwards, who had a colt's eyes — one said,
"Jesus! Oh I remember watermelon days!" And sped
High in a cloud of merriment, recalled
"— And when my Aunt Sally Simpson smiled," he
drawled —
"It was almost Louisiana, long ago."

"There's no place like Booneville though, Buddy,"
One said, excising a last burr from his vest,
"— For early trouting." Then peering in the can,
"— But I kept on the tracks." Possessed, resigned,

He trod the fire down pensively and grinned,
Spreading dry shingles of a beard....

Behind
My father's cannery works I used to see
Rail-squatters ranged in nomad raillery,
The ancient men — wifeless or runaway
Hobo-trekkers that forever search
An empire wilderness of freight and rails.
Each seemed a child, like me, on a loose perch,
Holding to childhood like some termless play.
John, Jake or Charley, hopping the slow freight
— Memphis to Tallahassee — riding the rods,
Blind fists of nothing, humpty-dumpty clods.

Yet they touch something like a key perhaps.
From pole to pole across the hills, the states
— They know a body under the wide rain;
Youngsters with eyes like fjords, old reprobates
With racetrack jargon,— dotting immensity
They lurk across her, knowing her yonder breast
Snow-silvered, sumac-stained or smoky blue —
Is past the valley-sleepers, south or west.
— As I have trod the rumorous midnights, too,

And past the circuit of the lamp's thin flame
(O Nights that brought me to her body bare!)
Have dreamed beyond the print that bound her name.
Trains sounding the long blizzards out — I heard
Wail into distances I knew were hers.

Papooses crying on the wind's long mane
Screamed redskin dynasties that fled the brain,
— Dead echoes! But I knew her body there,
Time like a serpent down her shoulder, dark,
And space, an eaglet's wing, laid on her hair.

Under the Ozarks, domed by Iron Mountain,
The old gods of the rain lie wrapped in pools
Where eyeless fish curvet a sunken fountain
And re-descend with corn from querulous crows.
Such pilferings make up their timeless eatage,
Propitiate them for their timber torn
By iron, iron — always the iron dealt cleavage!
They doze now, below axe and powder horn.

And Pullman breakfasters glide glistening steel
From tunnel into field — iron strides the dew —
Straddles the hill, a dance of wheel on wheel.
You have a half-hour's wait at Siskiyou,
Or stay the night and take the next train through.
Southward, near Cairo passing, you can see
The Ohio merging,— borne down Tennessee;
And if it's summer and the sun's in dusk
Maybe the breeze will lift the River's musk
— As though the waters breathed that you might know
Memphis Johnny, Steamboat Bill, Missouri Joe.
Oh, lean from the window, if the train slows down,
As though you touched hands with some ancient clown,
— A little while gaze absently below
And hum *Deep River* with them while they go.

Yes, turn again and sniff once more — look see,
O Sheriff, Brakeman and Authority —
Hitch up your pants and crunch another quid,
For you, too, feed the River timelessly.
And few evade full measure of their fate;
Always they smile out eerily what they seem.
I could believe he joked at heaven's gate —
Dan Midland — jolted from the cold brake-beam.

Down, down — born pioneers in time's despite,
Grimed tributaries to an ancient flow —
They win no frontier by their wayward plight,
But drift in stillness, as from Jordan's brow.

You will not hear it as the sea; even stone
Is not more hushed by gravity . . . But slow,
As loth to take more tribute — sliding prone
Like one whose eyes were buried long ago

The River, spreading, flows — and spends your dream.
What are you, lost within this tideless spell?
You are your father's father, and the stream —
A liquid theme that floating niggers swell.

Damp tonnage and alluvial march of days —
Nights turbid, vascular with silted shale
And roots surrendered down of moraine clays:
The Mississippi drinks the farthest dale.

O quarrying passion, undertowed sunlight!
The basalt surface drags a jungle grace

Ochreous and lynx-barred in lengthening might;
Patience! and you shall reach the biding place!

Over De Soto's bones the freighted floors
Throb past the City storied of three thrones.
Down two more turns the Mississippi pours
(Anon tall ironsides up from salt lagoons)

And flows within itself, heaps itself free.
All fades but one thin skyline 'round . . . Ahead
No embrace opens but the stinging sea;
The River lifts itself from its long bed,

Poised wholly on its dream, a mustard glow
Tortured with history, its one will — flow!
— The Passion spreads in wide tongues, choked and slow,
Meeting the Gulf, hosannas silently below.

THE DANCE

THE swift red flesh, a winter king —
Who squired the glacier woman down the sky?
She ran the neighing canyons all the spring;
She spouted arms; she rose with maize — to die.

And in the autumn drouth, whose burnished hands
With mineral wariness found out the stone
Where prayers, forgotten, streamed the mesa sands?
He holds the twilight's dim, perpetual throne.

Mythical brows we saw retiring — loth,
Disturbed and destined, into denser green.
Greeting they sped us, on the arrow's oath:
Now lie incorrigibly what years between...

There was a bed of leaves, and broken play;
There was a veil upon you, Pocahontas, bride —
O Princess whose brown lap was virgin May;
And bridal flanks and eyes hid tawny pride.

I left the village for dogwood. By the canoe
Tugging below the mill-race, I could see
Your hair's keen crescent running, and the blue
First moth of evening take wing stealthily.

What laughing chains the water wove and threw!
I learned to catch the trout's moon whisper; I

Drifted how many hours I never knew,
But, watching, saw that fleet young crescent die,—

And one star, swinging, take its place, alone,
Cupped in the larches of the mountain pass —
Until, immortally, it bled into the dawn.
I left my sleek boat nibbling margin grass...

I took the portage climb, then chose
A further valley-shed; I could not stop.
Feet nozzled wat'ry webs of upper flows;
One white veil gusted from the very top.

O Appalachian Spring! I gained the ledge;
Steep, inaccessible smile that eastward bends
And northward reaches in that violet wedge
Of Adirondacks!— wisped of azure wands,

Over how many bluffs, tarns, streams I sped!
— And knew myself within some boding shade:—
Grey tepees tufting the blue knolls ahead,
Smoke swirling through the yellow chestnut glade...

A distant cloud, a thunder-bud — it grew,
That blanket of the skies: the padded foot
Within,— I heard it; 'til its rhythm drew,
— Siphoned the black pool from the heart's hot root!

A cyclone threshes in the turbine crest,
Swooping in eagle feathers down your back;

Know, Maquokeeta, greeting; know death's best;
— Fall, Sachem, strictly as the tamarack!

A birch kneels. All her whistling fingers fly.
The oak grove circles in a crash of leaves;
The long moan of a dance is in the sky.
Dance, Maquokeeta: Pocahontas grieves . . .

And every tendon scurries toward the twangs
Of lightning deltaed down your saber hair.
Now snaps the flint in every tooth; red fangs
And splay tongues thinly busy the blue air . . .

Dance, Maquokeeta! snake that lives before,
That casts his pelt, and lives beyond! Sprout, horn!
Spark, tooth! Medicine-man, relent, restore —
Lie to us,— dance us back the tribal morn!

Spears and assemblies: black drums thrusting on —
O yelling battlements,— I, too, was liege
To rainbows currying each pulsant bone:
Surpassed the circumstance, danced out the siege!

And buzzard-circleted, screamed from the stake;
I could not pick the arrows from my side.
Wrapped in that fire, I saw more escorts wake —
Flickering, sprint up the hill groins like a tide.

I heard the hush of lava wrestling your arms,
And stag teeth foam about the raven throat;

Flame cataracts of heaven in seething swarms
Fed down your anklets to the sunset's moat.

O, like the lizard in the furious noon,
That drops his legs and colors in the sun,
— And laughs, pure serpent, Time itself, and moon
Of his own fate, I saw thy change begun!

And saw thee dive to kiss that destiny
Like one white meteor, sacrosanct and blent
At last with all that's consummate and free
There, where the first and last gods keep thy tent.

*

Thewed of the levin, thunder-shod and lean,
Lo, through what infinite seasons dost thou gaze —
Across what bivouacs of thin angered slain,
And see'st thy bride immortal in the maize!

Totem and fire-gall, slumbering pyramid —
Though other calendars now stack the sky,
Thy freedom is her largesse, Prince, and hid
On paths thou knewest best to claim her by.

High unto Labrador the sun strikes free
Her speechless dream of snow, and stirred again,
She is the torrent and the singing tree;
And she is virgin to the last of men . . .

West, west and south! winds over Cumberland
And winds across the llano grass resume

Her hair's warm sibilance. Her breasts are fanned
O stream by slope and vineyard — into bloom!

And when the caribou slant down for salt
Do arrows thirst and leap? Do antlers shine
Alert, star-triggered in the listening vault
Of dusk?— And are her perfect brows to thine?

We danced, O Brave, we danced beyond their farms,
In cobalt desert closures made our vows . . .
Now is the strong prayer folded in thine arms,
The serpent with the eagle in the boughs.

INDIANA

THE morning-glory, climbing the morning long
Over the lintel on its wiry vine,
Closes before the dusk, furls in its song
As I close mine...

And bison thunder rends my dreams no more
As once my womb was torn, my boy, when you
Yielded your first cry at the prairie's door...
Your father knew

Then, though we'd buried him behind us, far
Back on the gold trail — then his lost bones stirred...
But you who drop the scythe to grasp the oar
Knew not, nor heard.

How we, too, Prodigal, once rode off, too —
Waved Seminary Hill a gay good-bye...
We found God lavish there in Colorado
But passing sly.

The pebbles sang, the firecat slunk away
And glistening through the sluggard freshets came
In golden syllables loosed from the clay
His gleaming name.

A dream called Eldorado was his town,
It rose up shambling in the nuggets' wake,

It had no charter but a promised crown
Of claims to stake.

But we,— too late, too early, howsoever —
Won nothing out of fifty-nine — those years —
But gilded promise, yielded to us never,
And barren tears. . .

The long trail back! I huddled in the shade
Of wagon-tenting looked out once and saw
Bent westward, passing on a stumbling jade
A homeless squaw —

Perhaps a halfbreed. On her slender back
She cradled a babe's body, riding without rein.
Her eyes, strange for an Indian's, were not black
But sharp with pain

And like twin stars. They seemed to shun the gaze
Of all our silent men — the long team line —
Until she saw me — when their violet haze
Lit with love shine. . .

I held you up — I suddenly the bolder,
Knew that mere words could not have brought us nearer.
She nodded — and that smile across her shoulder
Will still endear her

As long as Jim, your father's memory, is warm.
Yes, Larry, now you're going to sea, remember

You were the first — before Ned and this farm,—
First-born, remember —

And since then — all that's left to me of Jim
Whose folks, like mine, came out of Arrowhead.
And you're the only one with eyes like him —
Kentucky bred!

I'm standing still, I'm old, I'm half of stone!
Oh, hold me in those eyes' engaging blue;
There's where the stubborn years gleam and atone,—
Where gold is true!

Down the dim turnpike to the river's edge —
Perhaps I'll hear the mare's hoofs to the ford. . .
Write me from Rio . . . and you'll keep your pledge;
I know your word!

Come back to Indiana — not too late!
(Or will you be a ranger to the end?)
Good-bye . . . Good-bye . . . oh, I shall always wait
You, Larry, traveller —
stranger,
son,
— my friend —

III

CUTTY SARK

O, the navies old and oaken,
O, the Temeraire no more!
—MELVILLE

I MET a man in South Street, tall —
a nervous shark tooth swung on his chain.
His eyes pressed through green grass
— green glasses, or bar lights made them
so —
shine —
GREEN —
eyes —
stepped out — forgot to look at you
or left you several blocks away —

in the nickel-in-the-slot piano jogged
"Stamboul Nights"— weaving somebody's nickel —
sang —

O Stamboul Rose — dreams weave the rose!

Murmurs of Leviathan he spoke,
and rum was Plato in our heads. . .

"It's S.S. *Ala* — Antwerp — now remember kid
to put me out at three she sails on time.

I'm not much good at time any more keep
weakeyed watches sometimes snooze —" his bony hands
got to beating time... "A whaler once —
I ought to keep time and get over it — I'm a
Democrat — I know what time it is — No
I don't want to know what time it is — that
damned white Arctic killed my time..."

O Stamboul Rose — drums weave —

"I ran a donkey engine down there on the Canal
in Panama — got tired of that —
then Yucatan selling kitchenware — beads —
have you seen Popocatepetl — birdless mouth
with ashes sifting down —?
and then the coast again..."

Rose of Stamboul O coral Queen —
teased remnants of the skeletons of cities —
and galleries, galleries of watergutted lava
snarling stone — green — drums — drown —

Sing!
"— that spiracle!" he shot a finger out the door...
"O life's a geyser — beautiful — my lungs —
No — I can't live on land —!"

I saw the frontiers gleaming of his mind;
or are there frontiers — running sands sometimes
running sands — somewhere — sands running...

Or they may start some white machine that sings.
Then you may laugh and dance the axletree —
steel — silver — kick the traces — and know —

ATLANTIS ROSE drums wreathe the rose,
the star floats burning in a gulf of tears
and sleep another thousand —

interminably
long since somebody's nickel — stopped —
playing —

A wind worried those wicker-neat lapels, the
swinging summer entrances to cooler hells. . .
Outside a wharf truck nearly ran him down
— he lunged up Bowery way while the dawn
was putting the Statue of Liberty out — that
torch of hers you know —

I started walking home across the Bridge. . .

*

Blithe Yankee vanities, turreted sprites, winged
British repartees, skil-
ful savage sea-girls
that bloomed in the spring — Heave, weave
those bright designs the trade winds drive. . .

Sweet opium and tea, Yo-ho!
Pennies for porpoises that bank the keel!
Fins whip the breeze around Japan!

Bright skysails ticketing the Line, wink round the Horn
to Frisco, Melbourne. . .
Pennants, parabolas —
clipper dreams indelible and ranging,
baronial white on lucky blue!

Perennial-*Cutty*-trophied-*Sark!*

Thermopylæ, Black Prince, Flying Cloud through Sunda
— scarfed of foam, their bellies veered green esplanades,
locked in wind-humors, ran their eastings down;

at Java Head freshened the nip
(*sweet opium and tea!*)
and turned and left us on the lee. . .

Buntlines tusseling (91 days, 20 hours and anchored!)
Rainbow, Leander
(last trip a tragedy)— where can you be
Nimbus? and you rivals two —

a long tack keeping —
Taeping?
Ariel?

IV

CAPE HATTERAS

The seas all crossed,
weathered the capes, the voyage done...
—WALT WHITMAN

IMPONDERABLE the dinosaur
sinks slow,
the mammoth saurian
ghoul, the eastern
Cape. .
While rises in the west the coastwise range,
slowly the hushed land—
Combustion at the astral core — the dorsal change
Of energy — convulsive shift of sand...
But we, who round the capes, the promontories
Where strange tongues vary messages of surf
Below grey citadels, repeating to the stars
The ancient names — return home to our own
Hearths, there to eat an apple and recall
The songs that gypsies dealt us at Marseille
Or how the priests walked — slowly through Bombay —
Or to read you, Walt,— knowing us in thrall

To that deep wonderment, our native clay
Whose depth of red, eternal flesh of Pocahontus —
Those continental folded æons, surcharged
With sweetness below derricks, chimneys, tunnels —

Is veined by all that time has really pledged us...
And from above, thin squeaks of radio static,
The captured fume of space foams in our ears —
What whisperings of far watches on the main
Relapsing into silence, while time clears
Our lenses, lifts a focus, resurrects
A periscope to glimpse what joys or pain
Our eyes can share or answer — then deflects
Us, shunting to a labyrinth submersed
Where each sees only his dim past reversed...

But that star-glistered salver of infinity,
The circle, blind crucible of endless space,
Is sluiced by motion,— subjugated never.
Adam and Adam's answer in the forest
Left Hesperus mirrored in the lucid pool.
Now the eagle dominates our days, is jurist
Of the ambiguous cloud. We know the strident rule
Of wings imperious... Space, instantaneous,
Flickers a moment, consumes us in its smile:
A flash over the horizon — shifting gears —
And we have laughter, or more sudden tears.
Dream cancels dream in this new realm of fact
From which we wake into the dream of act;
Seeing himself an atom in a shroud —
Man hears himself an engine in a cloud!

"— Recorders ages hence"— ah, syllables of faith!
Walt, tell me, Walt Whitman, if infinity
Be still the same as when you walked the beach

Near Paumanok — your lone patrol — and heard the
wraith
Through surf, its bird note there a long time falling...
For you, the panoramas and this breed of towers,
Of you — the theme that's statured in the cliff.
O Saunterer on free ways still ahead!
Not this our empire yet, but labyrinth
Wherein your eyes, like the Great Navigator's without ship,
Gleam from the great stones of each prison crypt
Of canyoned traffic... Confronting the Exchange,
Surviving in a world of stocks,— they also range
Across the hills where second timber strays
Back over Connecticut farms, abandoned pastures,—
Sea eyes and tidal, undenying, bright with myth!

The nasal whine of power whips a new universe...
Where spouting pillars spoor the evening sky,
Under the looming stacks of the gigantic power house
Stars prick the eyes with sharp ammoniac proverbs,
New verities, new inklings in the velvet hummed
Of dynamos, where hearing's leash is strummed...
Power's script,— wound, bobbin-bound, refined —
Is stropped to the slap of belts on booming spools, spurred
Into the bulging bouillon, harnessed jelly of the stars.
Towards what? The forked crash of split thunder parts
Our hearing momentwise; but fast in whirling armatures,
As bright as frogs' eyes, giggling in the girth
Of steely gizzards — axle-bound, confined
In coiled precision, bunched in mutual glee

The bearings glint,— O murmurless and shined
In oilrinsed circles of blind ecstasy!

Stars scribble on our eyes the frosty sagas,
The gleaming cantos of unvanquished space. . .
O sinewy silver biplane, nudging the wind's withers!
There, from Kill Devils Hill at Kitty Hawk
Two brothers in their twinship left the dune;
Warping the gale, the Wright windwrestlers veered
Capeward, then blading the wind's flank, banked and spun
What ciphers risen from prophetic script,
What marathons new-set between the stars!
The soul, by naphtha fledged into new reaches,
Already knows the closer clasp of Mars,—
New latitudes, unknotting, soon give place
To what fierce schedules, rife of doom apace!

Behold the dragon's covey — amphibian, ubiquitous
To hedge the seaboard, wrap the headland, ride
The blue's cloud-templed districts unto ether. . .
While Iliads glimmer through eyes raised in pride
Hell's belt springs wider into heaven's plumed side.
O bright circumferences, heights employed to fly
War's fiery kennel masked in downy offings,—
This tournament of space, the threshed and chiselled height,
Is baited by marauding circles, bludgeon flail
Of rancorous grenades whose screaming petals carve us
Wounds that we wrap with theorems sharp as hail!

Wheeled swiftly, wings emerge from larval-silver hangars.
Taut motors surge, space-gnawing, into flight;

Through sparkling visibility, outspread, unsleeping,
Wings clip the last peripheries of light. . .
Tellurian wind-sleuths on dawn patrol,
Each plane a hurtling javelin of winged ordnance,
Bristle the heights above a screeching gale to hover;
Surely no eye that Sunward Escadrille can cover!
There, meaningful, fledged as the Pleiades
With razor sheen they zoom each rapid helix!
Up-chartered choristers of their own speeding
They, cavalcade on escapade, shear Cumulus —
Lay siege and hurdle Cirrus down the skies!
While Cetus-like, O thou Dirigible, enormous Lounger
Of pendulous auroral beaches,— satellited wide
By convoy planes, moonferrets that rejoin thee
On fleeing balconies as thou dost glide,
— Hast splintered space!

Low, shadowed of the Cape,
Regard the moving turrets! From grey decks
See scouting griffons rise through gaseous crepe
Hung low . . . until a conch of thunder answers
Cloud-belfries, banging, while searchlights, like fencers,
Slit the sky's pancreas of foaming anthracite
Toward thee, O Corsair of the typhoon,— pilot, hear!
Thine eyes bicarbonated white by speed, O Skygak, see
How from thy path above the levin's lance
Thou sowest doom thou hast nor time nor chance
To reckon — as thy stilly eyes partake
What alcohol of space. . . ! Remember, Falcon-Ace,
Thou hast there in thy wrist a Sanskrit charge

To conjugate infinity's dim marge —
Anew. . . !

But first, here at this height receive
The benediction of the shell's deep, sure reprieve!
Lead-perforated fuselage, escutcheoned wings
Lift agonized quittance, tilting from the invisible brink
Now eagle-bright, now
quarry-hid, twist-
-ing, sink with
Enormous repercussive list-
-ings down
Giddily spiralled
gauntlets, upturned, unlooping
In guerrilla sleights, trapped in combustion gyr-
Ing, dance the curdled depth
down whizzing
Zodiacs, dashed
(now nearing fast the Cape!)
down gravitation's
vortex into crashed
. . . dispersion . . . into mashed and shapeless débris. . . .
By Hatteras bunched the beached heap of high bravery!

*

The stars have grooved our eyes with old persuasions
Of love and hatred, birth,— surcease of nations. . .
But who has held the heights more sure than thou,
O Walt!— Ascensions of thee hover in me now

As thou at junctions elegiac, there, of speed
With vast eternity, dost wield the rebound seed!
The competent loam, the probable grass,— travail
Of tides awash the pedestal of Everest, fail
Not less than thou in pure impulse inbred
To answer deepest soundings! O, upward from the dead
Thou bringest tally, and a pact, new bound,
Of living brotherhood!

Thou, there beyond —
Glacial sierras and the flight of ravens,
Hermetically past condor zones, through zenith havens
Past where the albatross has offered up
His last wing-pulse, and downcast as a cup
That's drained, is shivered back to earth — thy wand
Has beat a song, O Walt,— there and beyond!
And this, thine other hand, upon my heart
Is plummet ushered of those tears that start
What memories of vigils, bloody, by that Cape,—
Ghoul-mound of man's perversity at balk
And fraternal massacre! Thou, pallid there as chalk,
Hast kept of wounds, O Mourner, all that sum
That then from Appomattox stretched to Somme!

Cowslip and shad-blow, flaked like tethered foam
Around bared teeth of stallions, bloomed that spring
When first I read thy lines, rife as the loam
Of prairies, yet like breakers cliffward leaping!
O, early following thee, I searched the hill
Blue-writ and odor-firm with violets, 'til

With June the mountain laurel broke through green
And filled the forest with what clustrous sheen!
Potomac lilies,— then the Pontiac rose,
And Klondike edelweiss of occult snows!
White banks of moonlight came descending valleys —
How speechful on oak-vizored palisades,
As vibrantly I following down Sequoia alleys
Heard thunder's eloquence through green arcades
Set trumpets breathing in each clump and grass tuft —'til
Gold autumn, captured, crowned the trembling hill!

Panis Angelicus! Eyes tranquil with the blaze
Of love's own diametric gaze, of love's amaze!
Not greatest, thou,— not first, nor last,— but near
And onward yielding past my utmost year.
Familiar, thou, as mendicants in public places;
Evasive — too — as dayspring's spreading arc to trace is:—
Our Meistersinger, thou set breath in steel;
And it was thou who on the boldest heel
Stood up and flung the span on even wing
Of that great Bridge, our Myth, whereof I sing!

Years of the Modern! Propulsions toward what capes?
But thou, *Panis Angelicus,* hast thou not seen
And passed that Barrier that none escapes —
But knows it leastwise as death-strife?— O, something green,
Beyond all sesames of science was thy choice
Wherewith to bind us throbbing with one voice,

New integers of Roman, Viking, Celt —
Thou, Vedic Caesar, to the greensward knelt!

And now, as launched in abysmal cupolas of space,
Toward endless terminals, Easters of speeding light —
Vast engines outward veering with seraphic grace
On clarion cylinders pass out of sight
To course that span of consciousness thou'st named
The Open Road — thy vision is reclaimed!
What heritage thou'st signalled to our hands!

And see! the rainbow's arch — how shimmeringly stands
Above the Cape's ghoul-mound, O joyous seer!
Recorders ages hence, yes, they shall hear
In their own veins uncancelled thy sure tread
And read thee by the aureole 'round thy head
Of pasture-shine, *Panis Angelicus!*
Yes, Walt,
Afoot again, and onward without halt,—
Not soon, nor suddenly,— No, never to let go
My hand
in yours,
Walt Whitman —
so —

V

THREE SONGS

The one Sestos, the other Abydos hight.
—MARLOWE

SOUTHERN CROSS

I WANTED you, nameless Woman of the South,
No wraith, but utterly — as still more alone
The Southern Cross takes night
And lifts her girdles from her, one by one —
High, cool,
wide from the slowly smoldering fire
Of lower heavens,—
vaporous scars!
Eve! Magdalene!
or Mary, you?

Whatever call — falls vainly on the wave.
O simian Venus, homeless Eve,
Unwedded, stumbling gardenless to grieve
Windswept guitars on lonely decks forever;
Finally to answer all within one grave!

And this long wake of phosphor,
iridescent
Furrow of all our travel — trailed derision!

Eyes crumble at its kiss. Its long-drawn spell
Incites a yell. Slid on that backward vision
The mind is churned to spittle, whispering hell.

I wanted you . . . The embers of the Cross
Climbed by aslant and huddling aromatically.
It is blood to remember; it is fire
To stammer back . . . It is
God — your namelessness. And the wash —

All night the water combed you with black
Insolence. You crept out simmering, accomplished.
Water rattled that stinging coil, your
Rehearsed hair — docile, alas, from many arms.
Yes, Eve — wraith of my unloved seed!

The Cross, a phantom, buckled — dropped below the dawn.
Light drowned the lithic trillions of your spawn.

NATIONAL WINTER GARDEN

OUTSPOKEN buttocks in pink beads
Invite the necessary cloudy clinch
Of bandy eyes. . . . No extra mufflings here:
The world's one flagrant, sweating cinch.

And while legs waken salads in the brain
You pick your blonde out neatly through the smoke.
Always you wait for someone else though, always —
(Then rush the nearest exit through the smoke).

Always and last, before the final ring
When all the fireworks blare, begins
A tom-tom scrimmage with a somewhere violin,
Some cheapest echo of them all — begins.

And shall we call her whiter than the snow?
Sprayed first with ruby, then with emerald sheen —
Least tearful and least glad (who knows her smile?)
A caught slide shows her sandstone grey between.

Her eyes exist in swivellings of her teats,
Pearls whip her hips, a drench of whirling strands.
Her silly snake rings begin to mount, surmount
Each other — turquoise fakes on tinselled hands.

We wait that writhing pool, her pearls collapsed,
— All but her belly buried in the floor;

And the lewd trounce of a final muted beat!
We flee her spasm through a fleshless door. . . .

Yet, to the empty trapeze of your flesh,
O Magdalene, each comes back to die alone.
Then you, the burlesque of our lust — and faith,
Lug us back lifeward — bone by infant bone.

VIRGINIA

O RAIN at seven,
Pay-check at eleven —
Keep smiling the boss away,
Mary (what are you going to do?)
Gone seven — gone eleven,
And I'm still waiting you —

O blue-eyed Mary with the claret scarf,
Saturday Mary, mine!

It's high carillon
From the popcorn bells!
Pigeons by the million —
And Spring in Prince Street
Where green figs gleam
By oyster shells!

O Mary, leaning from the high wheat tower,
Let down your golden hair!

High in the noon of May
On cornices of daffodils
The slender violets stray.
Crap-shooting gangs in Bleecker reign,
Peonies with pony manes —
Forget-me-nots at windowpanes:

Out of the way-up nickel-dime tower shine,
Cathedral Mary,
shine!—

VI

QUAKER HILL

I see only the ideal. But no ideals have ever been fully successful on this earth.

—ISADORA DUNCAN

The gentian weaves her fringes,
The maple's loom is red.

—EMILY DICKINSON

PERSPECTIVE never withers from their eyes;
They keep that docile edict of the Spring
That blends March with August Antarctic skies:
These are but cows that see no other thing
Than grass and snow, and their own inner being
Through the rich halo that they do not trouble
Even to cast upon the seasons fleeting
Though they should thin and die on last year's stubble.

And they are awkward, ponderous and uncoy . . .
While we who press the cider mill, regarding them —
We, who with pledges taste the bright annoy
Of friendship's acid wine, retarding phlegm,
Shifting reprisals ('til who shall tell us when
The jest is too sharp to be kindly?) boast
Much of our store of faith in other men
Who would, ourselves, stalk down the merriest ghost.

Above them old Mizzentop, palatial white
Hostelry — floor by floor to cinquefoil dormer
Portholes the ceilings stack their stoic height.
Long tiers of windows staring out toward former
Faces — loose panes crown the hill and gleam
At sunset with a silent, cobwebbed patience . . .
See them, like eyes that still uphold some dream
Through mapled vistas, cancelled reservations!

High from the central cupola, they say
One's glance could cross the borders of three states;
But I have seen death's stare in slow survey
From four horizons that no one relates . . .
Weekenders avid of their turf-won scores,
Here three hours from the semaphores, the Czars
Of golf, by twos and threes in plaid plusfours
Alight with sticks abristle and cigars.

This was the Promised Land, and still it is
To the persuasive suburban land agent
In bootleg roadhouses where the gin fizz
Bubbles in time to Hollywood's new love-nest pageant.
Fresh from the radio in the old Meeting House
(Now the New Avalon Hotel) volcanoes roar
A welcome to highsteppers that no mouse
Who saw the Friends there ever heard before.

What cunning neighbors history has in fine!
The woodlouse mortgages the ancient deal
Table that Powitzky buys for only nine-

Ty-five at Adams' auction,— eats the seal,
The spinster polish of antiquity . . .
Who holds the lease on time and on disgrace?
What eats the pattern with ubiquity?
Where are my kinsmen and the patriarch race?

The resigned factions of the dead preside.
Dead rangers bled their comfort on the snow;
But I must ask slain Iroquois to guide
Me farther than scalped Yankees knew to go:
Shoulder the curse of sundered parentage,
Wait for the postman driving from Birch Hill
With birthright by blackmail, the arrant page
That unfolds a new destiny to fill. . . .

So, must we from the hawk's far stemming view,
Must we descend as worm's eye to construe
Our love of all we touch, and take it to the Gate
As humbly as a guest who knows himself too late,
His news already told? Yes, while the heart is wrung,
Arise — yes, take this sheaf of dust upon your tongue!
In one last angelus lift throbbing throat —
Listen, transmuting silence with that stilly note

Of pain that Emily, that Isadora knew!
While high from dim elm-chancels hung with dew,
That triple-noted clause of moonlight —
Yes, whip-poor-will, unhusks the heart of fright,
Breaks us and saves, yes, breaks the heart, yet yields
That patience that is armour and that shields

Love from despair — when love foresees the end —
Leaf after autumnal leaf
break off,
descend —
descend —

VII

THE TUNNEL

To Find the Western path
Right thro' the Gates of Wrath.
—BLAKE

PERFORMANCES, assortments, résumés —
Up Times Square to Columbus Circle lights
Channel the congresses, nightly sessions,
Refractions of the thousand theatres, faces —
Mysterious kitchens. . . . You shall search them all.
Some day by heart you'll learn each famous sight
And watch the curtain lift in hell's despite;
You'll find the garden in the third act dead,
Finger your knees — and wish yourself in bed
With tabloid crime-sheets perched in easy sight.

Then let you reach your hat
and go.
As usual, let you — also
walking down — exclaim
to twelve upward leaving
a subscription praise
for what time slays.

Or can't you quite make up your mind to ride;
A walk is better underneath the L a brisk
Ten blocks or so before? But you find yourself

Preparing penguin flexions of the arms,—
As usual you will meet the scuttle yawn:
The subway yawns the quickest promise home.

Be minimum, then, to swim the hiving swarms
Out of the Square, the Circle burning bright —
Avoid the glass doors gyring at your right,
Where boxed alone a second, eyes take fright
— Quite unprepared rush naked back to light:
And down beside the turnstile press the coin
Into the slot. The gongs already rattle.

And so
of cities you bespeak
subways, rivered under streets
and rivers. . . . In the car
the overtone of motion
underground, the monotone
of motion is the sound
of other faces, also underground —

"Let's have a pencil Jimmy — living now
at Floral Park
Flatbush — on the Fourth of July —
like a pigeon's muddy dream — potatoes
to dig in the field — travlin the town — too —
night after night — the Culver line — the
girls all shaping up — it used to be —"

Our tongues recant like beaten weather vanes.
This answer lives like verdigris, like hair

Beyond extinction, surcease of the bone;
And repetition freezes —"What

"what do you want? getting weak on the links?
fandaddle daddy don't ask for change — IS THIS
FOURTEENTH? it's half past six she said — if
you don't like my gate why did you
swing on it, why *didja*
swing on it
anyhow —"

And somehow anyhow swing —

The phonographs of hades in the brain
Are tunnels that re-wind themselves, and love
A burnt match skating in a urinal —
Somewhere above Fourteenth TAKE THE EXPRESS
To brush some new presentiment of pain —

"But I want service in this office SERVICE
I said — after
the show she cried a little afterwards but —"

Whose head is swinging from the swollen strap?
Whose body smokes along the bitten rails,
Bursts from a smoldering bundle far behind
In back forks of the chasms of the brain,—
Puffs from a riven stump far out behind
In interborough fissures of the mind . . . ?

And why do I often meet your visage here,
Your eyes like agate lanterns — on and on
Below the toothpaste and the dandruff ads?
— And did their riding eyes right through your side,
And did their eyes like unwashed platters ride?
And Death, aloft,— gigantically down
Probing through you — toward me, O evermore!
And when they dragged your retching flesh,
Your trembling hands that night through Baltimore —
That last night on the ballot rounds, did you
Shaking, did you deny the ticket, Poe?

For Gravesend Manor change at Chambers Street.
The platform hurries along to a dead stop.

The intent escalator lifts a serenade
Stilly
Of shoes, umbrellas, each eye attending its shoe, then
Bolting outright somewhere above where streets
Burst suddenly in rain. . . . The gongs recur:
Elbows and levers, guard and hissing door.
Thunder is galvothermic here below. . . . The car
Wheels off. The train rounds, bending to a scream,
Taking the final level for the dive
Under the river —
And somewhat emptier than before,
Demented, for a hitching second, humps; then
Lets go. . . . Toward corners of the floor
Newspapers wing, revolve and wing.
Blank windows gargle signals through the roar.

And does the Dæmon take you home, also,
Wop washerwoman, with the bandaged hair?
After the corridors are swept, the cuspidors —
The gaunt sky-barracks cleanly now, and bare,
O Genoese, do you bring mother eyes and hands
Back home to children and to golden hair?

Dæmon, demurring and eventful yawn!
Whose hideous laughter is a bellows mirth
— Or the muffled slaughter of a day in birth —
O cruelly to inoculate the brinking dawn
With antennæ toward worlds that glow and sink;—
To spoon us out more liquid than the dim
Locution of the eldest star, and pack
The conscience navelled in the plunging wind,
Umbilical to call — and straightway die!

O caught like pennies beneath soot and steam,
Kiss of our agony thou gatherest;
Condensed, thou takest all — shrill ganglia
Impassioned with some song we fail to keep.
And yet, like Lazarus, to feel the slope,
The sod and billow breaking,— lifting ground,
— A sound of waters bending astride the sky
Unceasing with some Word that will not die . . . !

*

A tugboat, wheezing wreaths of steam,
Lunged past, with one galvanic blare stove up the River.
I counted the echoes assembling, one after one,

Searching, thumbing the midnight on the piers.
Lights, coasting, left the oily tympanum of waters;
The blackness somewhere gouged glass on a sky.
And this thy harbor, O my City, I have driven under,
Tossed from the coil of ticking towers. . . . Tomorrow,
And to be. . . . Here by the River that is East —
Here at the waters' edge the hands drop memory;
Shadowless in that abyss they unaccounting lie.
How far away the star has pooled the sea —
Or shall the hands be drawn away, to die?

Kiss of our agony Thou gatherest,
O Hand of Fire
gatherest —

VIII

ATLANTIS

Music is then the knowledge of that which relates to love in harmony and system.

—PLATO

THROUGH the bound cable strands, the arching path
Upward, veering with light, the flight of strings,—
Taut miles of shuttling moonlight syncopate
The whispered rush, telepathy of wires.
Up the index of night, granite and steel —
Transparent meshes — fleckless the gleaming staves —
Sibylline voices flicker, waveringly stream
As though a god were issue of the strings. . . .

And through that cordage, threading with its call
One arc synoptic of all tides below —
Their labyrinthine mouths of history
Pouring reply as though all ships at sea
Complighted in one vibrant breath made cry,—
"Make thy love sure — to weave whose song we ply!"
— From black embankments, moveless soundings hailed,
So seven oceans answer from their dream.

And on, obliquely up bright carrier bars
New octaves trestle the twin monoliths
Beyond whose frosted capes the moon bequeaths

Two worlds of sleep (O arching strands of song!)—
Onward and up the crystal-flooded aisle
White tempest nets file upward, upward ring
With silver terraces the humming spars,
The loft of vision, palladium helm of stars.

Sheerly the eyes, like seagulls stung with rime —
Slit and propelled by glistening fins of light —
Pick biting way up towering looms that press
Sidelong with flight of blade on tendon blade
— Tomorrows into yesteryear — and link
What cipher-script of time no traveller reads
But who, through smoking pyres of love and death,
Searches the timeless laugh of mythic spears.

Like hails, farewells —up planet-sequined heights
Some trillion whispering hammers glimmer Tyre:
Serenely, sharply up the long anvil cry
Of inchling æons silence rivets Troy.
And you, aloft there — Jason! hesting Shout!
Still wrapping harness to the swarming air!
Silvery the rushing wake, surpassing call,
Beams yelling Æolus! splintered in the straits!

From gulfs unfolding, terrible of drums,
Tall Vision-of-the-Voyage, tensely spare —
Bridge, lifting night to cycloramic crest
Of deepest day — O Choir, translating time
Into what multitudinous Verb the suns
And synergy of waters ever fuse, recast

In myriad syllables,— Psalm of Cathay!
O Love, thy white, pervasive Paradigm . . . !

We left the haven hanging in the night —
Sheened harbor lanterns backward fled the keel.
Pacific here at time's end, bearing corn,—
Eyes stammer through the pangs of dust and steel.
And still the circular, indubitable frieze
Of heaven's meditation, yoking wave
To kneeling wave, one song devoutly binds —
The vernal strophe chimes from deathless strings!

O Thou steeled Cognizance whose leap commits
The agile precincts of the lark's return;
Within whose lariat sweep encinctured sing
In single chrysalis the many twain,—
Of stars Thou art the stitch and stallion glow
And like an organ, Thou, with sound of doom —
Sight, sound and flesh Thou leadest from time's realm
As love strikes clear direction for the helm.

Swift peal of secular light, intrinsic Myth
Whose fell unshadow is death's utter wound,—
O River-throated — iridescently upborne
Through the bright drench and fabric of our veins;
With white escarpments swinging into light,
Sustained in tears the cities are endowed
And justified conclamant with ripe fields
Revolving through their harvests in sweet torment.
Forever Deity's glittering Pledge, O Thou

Whose canticle fresh chemistry assigns
To rapt inception and beatitude,—
Always through blinding cables, to our joy,
Of thy white seizure springs the prophecy:
Always through spiring cordage, pyramids
Of silver sequel, Deity's young name
Kinetic of white choiring wings . . . ascends.

Migrations that must needs void memory,
Inventions that cobblestone the heart,—
Unspeakable Thou Bridge to Thee, O Love.
Thy pardon for this history, whitest Flower,
O Answerer of all,— Anemone,—
Now while thy petals spend the suns about us, hold —
(O Thou whose radiance doth inherit me)
Atlantis,— hold thy floating singer late!

So to thine Everpresence, beyond time,
Like spears ensanguined of one tolling star
That bleeds infinity — the orphic strings,
Sidereal phalanxes, leap and converge:
— One Song, one Bridge of Fire! Is it Cathay,
Now pity steeps the grass and rainbows ring
The serpent with the eagle in the leaves . . . ?
Whispers antiphonal in azure swing.

TWO·WHITE BUILDINGS

Ce ne peut être que la fin du monde, en avançant.

—RIMBAUD

TO WALDO FRANK

LEGEND

As silent as a mirror is believed
Realities plunge in silence by . . .

I am not ready for repentance;
Nor to match regrets. For the moth
Bends no more than the still
Imploring flame. And tremorous
In the white falling flakes
Kisses are,—
The only worth all granting.

It is to be learned —
This cleaving and this burning,
But only by the one who
Spends out himself again.

Twice and twice
(Again the smoking souvenir,
Bleeding eidolon!) and yet again.
Until the bright logic is won
Unwhispering as a mirror
Is believed.

Then, drop by caustic drop, a perfect cry
Shall string some constant harmony,—
Relentless caper for all those who step
The legend of their youth into the noon.

BLACK TAMBOURINE

THE interests of a black man in a cellar
Mark tardy judgment on the world's closed door.
Gnats toss in the shadow of a bottle,
And a roach spans a crevice in the floor.

Æsop, driven to pondering, found
Heaven with the tortoise and the hare;
Fox brush and sow ear top his grave
And mingling incantations on the air.

The black man, forlorn in the cellar,
Wanders in some mid-kingdom, dark, that lies,
Between his tambourine, stuck on the wall,
And, in Africa, a carcass quick with flies.

EMBLEMS OF CONDUCT

By a peninsula the wanderer sat and sketched
The uneven valley graves. While the apostle gave
Alms to the meek the volcano burst
With sulphur and aureate rocks . . .
For joy rides in stupendous coverings
Luring the living into spiritual gates.

Orators follow the universe
And radio the complete laws to the people.
The apostle conveys thought through discipline.
Bowls and cups fill historians with adorations,—
Dull lips commemorating spiritual gates.

The wanderer later chose this spot of rest
Where marble clouds support the sea
And where was finally borne a chosen hero.
By that time summer and smoke were past.
Dolphins still played, arching the horizons,
But only to build memories of spiritual gates.

MY GRANDMOTHER'S LOVE LETTERS

THERE are no stars to-night
But those of memory.
Yet how much room for memory there is
In the loose girdle of soft rain.

There is even room enough
For the letters of my mother's mother,
Elizabeth,
That have been pressed so long
Into a corner of the roof
That they are brown and soft,
And liable to melt as snow.

Over the greatness of such space
Steps must be gentle.
It is all hung by an invisible white hair.
It trembles as birch limbs webbing the air.

And I ask myself:

"Are your fingers long enough to play
Old keys that are but echoes:

Is the silence strong enough
To carry back the music to its source
And back to you again
As though to her?"

Yet I would lead my grandmother by the hand
Through much of what she would not understand;
And so I stumble. And the rain continues on the roof
With such a sound of gently pitying laughter.

SUNDAY MORNING APPLES

TO WILLIAM SOMMER

THE leaves will fall again sometime and fill
The fleece of nature with those purposes
That are your rich and faithful strength of line.

But now there are challenges to spring
In that ripe nude with head
reared
Into a realm of swords, her purple shadow
Bursting on the winter of the world
From whiteness that cries defiance to the snow.

A boy runs with a dog before the sun, straddling
Spontaneities that form their independent orbits,
Their own perennials of light
In the valley where you live
(called Brandywine).

I have seen the apples there that toss you secrets,—
Beloved apples of seasonable madness
That feed your inquiries with aerial wine.
Put them again beside a pitcher with a knife,
And poise them full and ready for explosion —
The apples, Bill, the apples!

PRAISE FOR AN URN

IN MEMORIAM: ERNEST NELSON

It was a kind and northern face
That mingled in such exile guise
The everlasting eyes of Pierrot
And, of Gargantua, the laughter.

His thoughts, delivered to me
From the white coverlet and pillow,
I see now, were inheritances —
Delicate riders of the storm.

The slant moon on the slanting hill
Once moved us toward presentiments
Of what the dead keep, living still,
And such assessments of the soul

As, perched in the crematory lobby,
The insistent clock commented on,
Touching as well upon our praise
Of glories proper to the time.

Still, having in mind gold hair,
I cannot see that broken brow

And miss the dry sound of bees
Stretching across a lucid space.

Scatter these well-meant idioms
Into the smoky spring that fills
The suburbs, where they will be lost.
They are no trophies of the sun.

GARDEN ABSTRACT

THE apple on its bough is her desire,—
Shining suspension, mimic of the sun.
The bough has caught her breath up, and her voice,
Dumbly articulate in the slant and rise
Of branch on branch above her, blurs her eyes.
She is prisoner of the tree and its green fingers.

And so she comes to dream herself the tree,
The wind possessing her, weaving her young veins,
Holding her to the sky and its quick blue,
Drowning the fever of her hands in sunlight.
She has no memory, nor fear, nor hope
Beyond the grass and shadows at her feet.

THE lover's death, how regular
With lifting spring and starker
Vestiges of the sun that somehow
Filter in to us before we waken.

Not yet is there that heat and sober
Vivisection of more clamant air
That hands joined in the dark will answer
After the daily circuits of its glare.

It is the time of sundering . . .
Beneath the green silk counterpane
Her mound of undelivered life
Lies cool upon her — not yet pain.

And she will wake before you pass,
Scarcely aloud, beyond her door,
And every third step down the stair
Until you reach the muffled floor —

Will laugh and call your name; while you
Still answering her faint good-byes,

Will find the street, only to look
At doors and stone with broken eyes.

Walk now, and note the lover's death.
Henceforth her memory is more
Than yours, in cries, in ecstasies
You cannot ever reach to share.

CHAPLINESQUE

We make our meek adjustments,
Contented with such random consolations
As the wind deposits
In slithered and too ample pockets.

For we can still love the world, who find
A famished kitten on the step, and know
Recesses for it from the fury of the street,
Or warm torn elbow coverts.

We will sidestep, and to the final smirk
Dally the doom of that inevitable thumb
That slowly chafes its puckered index toward us,
Facing the dull squint with what innocence
And what surprise!

And yet these fine collapses are not lies
More than the pirouettes of any pliant cane;
Our obsequies are, in a way, no enterprise.
We can evade you, and all else but the heart:
What blame to us if the heart live on.

The game enforces smirks; but we have seen
The moon in lonely alleys make
A grail of laughter of an empty ash can,
And through all sound of gaiety and quest
Have heard a kitten in the wilderness.

PASTORALE

No more violets,
And the year
Broken into smoky panels.
What woods remember now
Her calls, her enthusiasms?

That ritual of sap and leaves
The sun drew out,
Ends in this latter muffled
Bronze and brass. The wind
Takes rein.

If, dusty, I bear
An image beyond this
Already fallen harvest,
I can only query, "Fool —
Have you remembered too long;

Or was there too little said
For ease or resolution —
Summer scarcely begun
And violets,
A few picked, the rest dead?"

IN SHADOW

Out in the late amber afternoon,
Confused among chrysanthemums,
Her parasol, a pale balloon,
Like a waiting moon, in shadow swims.

Her furtive lace and misty hair
Over the garden dial distill
The sunlight,— then withdrawing, wear
Again the shadows at her will.

Gently yet suddenly, the sheen
Of stars inwraps her parasol.
She hears my step behind the green
Twilight, stiller than shadows, fall.

"Come, it is too late,— too late
To risk alone the light's decline:
Nor has the evening long to wait,"—
But her own words are night's and mine.

THE FERNERY

THE lights that travel on her spectacles
Seldom, now, meet a mirror in her eyes.
But turning, as you may chance to lift a shade
Beside her and her fernery, is to follow
The zigzags fast around dry lips composed
To darkness through a wreath of sudden pain.

— So, while fresh sunlight splinters humid green
I have known myself a nephew to confusions
That sometimes take up residence and reign
In crowns less grey — O merciless tidy hair!

NORTH LABRADOR

A LAND of leaning ice
Hugged by plaster-grey arches of sky,
Flings itself silently
Into eternity.

"Has no one come here to win you,
Or left you with the faintest blush
Upon your glittering breasts?
Have you no memories, O Darkly Bright?"

Cold-hushed, there is only the shifting of moments
That journey toward no Spring —
No birth, no death, no time nor sun
In answer.

REPOSE OF RIVERS

THE willows carried a slow sound,
A sarabande the wind mowed on the mead.
I could never remember
That seething, steady leveling of the marshes
Till age had brought me to the sea.

Flags, weeds. And remembrance of steep alcoves
Where cypresses shared the noon's
Tyranny; they drew me into hades almost.
And mammoth turtles climbing sulphur dreams
Yielded, while sun-silt rippled them
Asunder...

How much I would have bartered! the black gorge
And all the singular nestings in the hills
Where beavers learn stitch and tooth.
The pond I entered once and quickly fled—
I remember now its singing willow rim.

And finally, in that memory all things nurse;
After the city that I finally passed
With scalding unguents spread and smoking darts

The monsoon cut across the delta
At gulf gates... There, beyond the dykes

I heard wind flaking sapphire, like this summer,
And willows could not hold more steady sound.

PARAPHRASE

Of a steady winking beat between
Systole, diastole spokes-of-a-wheel
One rushing from the bed at night
May find the record wedged in his soul.

Above the feet the clever sheets
Lie guard upon the integers of life:
For what skims in between uncurls the toe,
Involves the hands in purposeless repose.

But from its bracket how can the tongue tell
When systematic morn shall sometime flood
The pillow — how desperate is the light
That shall not rouse, how faint the crow's cavil

As, when stunned in that antarctic blaze,
Your head, unrocking to a pulse, already
Hollowed by air, posts a white paraphrase
Among bruised roses on the papered wall.

POSSESSIONS

WITNESS now this trust! the rain
That steals softly direction
And the key, ready to hand — sifting
One moment in sacrifice (the direst)
Through a thousand nights the flesh
Assaults outright for bolts that linger
Hidden,— O undirected as the sky
That through its black foam has no eyes
For this fixed stone of lust . . .

Accumulate such moments to an hour:
Account the total of this trembling tabulation.
I know the screen, the distant flying taps
And stabbing medley that sways —
And the mercy, feminine, that stays
As though prepared.

And I, entering, take up the stone
As quiet as you can make a man . . .
In Bleecker Street, still trenchant in a void,
Wounded by apprehensions out of speech,
I hold it up against a disk of light —

I, turning, turning on smoked forking spires,
The city's stubborn lives, desires.

Tossed on these horns, who bleeding dies,
Lacks all but piteous admissions to be spilt
Upon the page whose blind sum finally burns
Record of rage and partial appetites.
The pure possession, the inclusive cloud
Whose heart is fire shall come,— the white wind raze
All but bright stones wherein our smiling plays.

LACHRYMAE CHRISTI

WHITELY, while benzine
Rinsings from the moon
Dissolve all but the windows of the mills
(Inside the sure machinery
Is still
And curdled only where a sill
Sluices its one unyielding smile)

Immaculate venom binds
The fox's teeth, and swart
Thorns freshen on the year's
First blood. From flanks unfended,
Twanged red perfidies of spring
Are trillion on the hill.

And the nights opening
Chant pyramids,—
Anoint with innocence,— recall
To music and retrieve what perjuries
Had galvanized the eyes.
While chime
Beneath and all around
Distilling clemencies,— worms'

Inaudible whistle, tunneling
Not penitence
But song, as these
Perpetual fountains, vines,—

Thy Nazarene and tinder eyes.

(Let sphinxes from the ripe
Borage of death have cleared my tongue
Once and again; vermin and rod
No longer bind. Some sentient cloud
Of tears flocks through the tendoned loam:
Betrayed stones slowly speak.)

Names peeling from Thine eyes
And their undimming lattices of flame,
Spell out in palm and pain
Compulsion of the year, O Nazarene.

Lean long from sable, slender boughs,
Unstanched and luminous. And as the nights
Strike from Thee perfect spheres,
Lift up in lilac-emerald breath the grail
Of earth again —
Thy face
From charred and riven stakes, O
Dionysus, Thy
Unmangled target smile.

PASSAGE

WHERE the cedar leaf divides the sky
I heard the sea.
In sapphire arenas of the hills
I was promised an improved infancy.

Sulking, sanctioning the sun,
My memory I left in a ravine,—
Casual louse that tissues the buckwheat,
Aprons rocks, congregates pears
In moonlit bushels
And wakens alleys with a hidden cough.

Dangerously the summer burned
(I had joined the entrainments of the wind).
The shadows of boulders lengthened my back:
In the bronze gongs of my cheeks
The rain dried without odour.

"It is not long, it is not long;
See where the red and black
Vine-stanchioned valleys —": but the wind
Died speaking through the ages that you know
And hug, chimney-sooted heart of man!

So was I turned about and back, much as your smoke
Compiles a too well-known biography.

The evening was a spear in the ravine
That throve through very oak. And had I walked
The dozen particular decimals of time?
Touching an opening laurel, I found
A thief beneath, my stolen book in hand.

"Why are you back here — smiling an iron coffin?"
"To argue with the laurel," I replied:
"Am justified in transience, fleeing
Under the constant wonder of your eyes —."

He closed the book. And from the Ptolemies
Sand troughed us in a glittering abyss.
A serpent swam a vertex to the sun
— On unpaced beaches leaned its tongue and drummed.
What fountains did I hear? what icy speeches?
Memory, committed to the page, had broke.

THE WINE MENAGERIE

INVARIABLY when wine redeems the sight,
Narrowing the mustard scansions of the eyes,
A leopard ranging always in the brow
Asserts a vision in the slumbering gaze.

Then glozening decanters that reflect the street
Wear me in crescents on their bellies. Slow
Applause flows into liquid cynosures:
— I am conscripted to their shadows' glow.

Against the imitation onyx wainscoting
(Painted emulsion of snow, eggs, yarn, coal, manure)
Regard the forceps of the smile that takes her.
Percussive sweat is spreading to his hair. Mallets,
Her eyes, unmake an instant of the world . . .

What is it in this heap the serpent pries —
Whose skin, facsimile of time, unskeins
Octagon, sapphire transepts round the eyes;
— From whom some whispered carillon assures
Speed to the arrow into feathered skies?

Sharp to the window-pane guile drags a face,
And as the alcove of her jealousy recedes

An urchin who has left the snow
Nudges a cannister across the bar
While August meadows somewhere clasp his brow.

Each chamber, transept, coins some squint,
Remorseless line, minting their separate wills —
Poor streaked bodies wreathing up and out,
Unwitting the stigma that each turn repeals:
Between black tusks the roses shine!

New thresholds, new anatomies! Wine talons
Build freedom up about me and distill
This competence — to travel in a tear
Sparkling alone, within another's will.

Until my blood dreams a receptive smile
Wherein new purities are snared; where chimes
Before some flame of gaunt repose a shell
Tolled once, perhaps, by every tongue in hell.
— Anguished, the wit that cries out of me:

"Alas,— these frozen billows of your skill!
Invent new dominoes of love and bile . . .
Ruddy, the tooth implicit of the world
Has followed you. Though in the end you know
And count some dim inheritance of sand,
How much yet meets the treason of the snow.

"Rise from the dates and crumbs. And walk away,
Stepping over Holofernes' shins —

Beyond the wall, whose severed head floats by
With Baptist John's. Their whispering begins.

"— And fold your exile on your back again;
Petrushka's valentine pivots on its pin."

RECITATIVE

REGARD the capture here, O Janus-faced,
As double as the hands that twist this glass.
Such eyes at search or rest you cannot see;
Reciting pain or glee, how can you bear!

Twin shadowed halves: the breaking second holds
In each the skin alone, and so it is
I crust a plate of vibrant mercury
Borne cleft to you, and brother in the half.

Inquire this much-exacting fragment smile,
Its drums and darkest blowing leaves ignore,—
Defer though, revocation of the tears
That yield attendance to one crucial sign.

Look steadily — how the wind feasts and spins
The brain's disk shivered against lust. Then watch
While darkness, like an ape's face, falls away,
And gradually white buildings answer day.

Let the same nameless gulf beleaguer us —
Alike suspend us from atrocious sums
Built floor by floor on shafts of steel that grant
The plummet heart, like Absalom, no stream.

The highest tower,— let her ribs palisade
Wrenched gold of Nineveh;— yet leave the tower.
The bridge swings over salvage, beyond wharves;
A wind abides the ensign of your will . . .

In alternating bells have you not heard
All hours clapped dense into a single stride?
Forgive me for an echo of these things,
And let us walk through time with equal pride.

FOR THE MARRIAGE OF FAUSTUS AND HELEN

"And so we may arrive by Talmud skill
And profane Greek to raise the building up
Of Helen's house against the Ismaelite,
King of Thogarma, and his habergeons
Brimstony, blue and fiery; and the force
Of King Abaddon, and the beast of Cittim;
Which Rabbi David Kimchi, Onkelos,
And Aben Ezra do interpret Rome."

—THE ALCHEMIST

I

THE mind has shown itself at times
Too much the baked and labeled dough
Divided by accepted multitudes.
Across the stacked partitions of the day —
Across the memoranda, baseball scores,
The stenographic smiles and stock quotations
Smutty wings flash out equivocations.

The mind is brushed by sparrow wings;
Numbers, rebuffed by asphalt, crowd
The margins of the day, accent the curbs,
Convoying divers dawns on every corner
To druggist, barber and tobacconist,
Until the graduate opacities of evening
Take them away as suddenly to somewhere
Virginal perhaps, less fragmentary, cool.

There is the world dimensional for those untwisted by the love of things irreconcilable . . .

And yet, suppose some evening I forgot
The fare and transfer, yet got by that way
Without recall,— lost yet poised in traffic.
Then I might find your eyes across an aisle,
Still flickering with those prefigurations —
Prodigal, yet uncontested now,
Half-riant before the jerky window frame.

There is some way, I think, to touch
Those hands of yours that count the nights
Stippled with pink and green advertisements.
And now, before its arteries turn dark,
I would have you meet this bartered blood.
Imminent in his dream, none better knows
The white wafer cheek of love, or offers words
Lightly as moonlight on the eaves meets snow.

Reflective conversion of all things
At your deep blush, when ecstasies thread
The limbs and belly, when rainbows spread
Impinging on the throat and sides . . .
Inevitable, the body of the world
Weeps in inventive dust for the hiatus
That winks above it, bluet in your breasts.

The earth may glide diaphanous to death;
But if I lift my arms it is to bend

To you who turned away once, Helen, knowing
The press of troubled hands, too alternate
With steel and soil to hold you endlessly.
I meet you, therefore, in that eventual flame
You found in final chains, no captive then —
Beyond their million brittle, bloodshot eyes;
White, through white cities passed on to assume
That world which comes to each of us alone.

Accept a lone eye riveted to your plane,
Bent axle of devotion along companion ways
That beat, continuous, to hourless days —
One inconspicuous, glowing orb of praise.

II

BRAZEN hypnotics glitter here;
Glee shifts from foot to foot,
Magnetic to their tremolo.
This crashing opéra bouffe,
Blest excursion! this ricochet
From roof to roof —
Know, Olympians, we are breathless
While nigger cupids scour the stars!

A thousand light shrugs balance us
Through snarling hails of melody.
White shadows slip across the floor
Splayed like cards from a loose hand;
Rhythmic ellipses lead into canters
Until somewhere a rooster banters.

Greet naïvely — yet intrepidly
New soothings, new amazements
That cornets introduce at every turn —
And you may fall downstairs with me
With perfect grace and equanimity.
Or, plaintively scud past shores
Where, by strange harmonic laws
All relatives, serene and cool,
Sit rocked in patent armchairs.

O, I have known metallic paradises
Where cuckoos clucked to finches
Above the deft catastrophes of drums.
While titters hailed the groans of death
Beneath gyrating awnings I have seen
The incunabula of the divine grotesque.
This music has a reassuring way.

The siren of the springs of guilty song —
Let us take her on the incandescent wax
Striated with nuances, nervosities
That we are heir to: she is still so young,
We cannot frown upon her as she smiles,
Dipping here in this cultivated storm
Among slim skaters of the gardened skies.

III

CAPPED arbiter of beauty in this street
That narrows darkly into motor dawn,—
You, here beside me, delicate ambassador
Of intricate slain numbers that arise
In whispers, naked of steel;
religious gunman!
Who faithfully, yourself, will fall too soon,
And in other ways than as the wind settles
On the sixteen thrifty bridges of the city:
Let us unbind our throats of fear and pity.

We even,
Who drove speediest destruction
In corymbulous formations of mechanics,—
Who hurried the hill breezes, spouting malice
Plangent over meadows, and looked down
On rifts of torn and empty houses
Like old women with teeth unjubilant
That waited faintly, briefly and in vain:

We know, eternal gunman, our flesh remembers
The tensile boughs, the nimble blue plateaus,
The mounted, yielding cities of the air!
That saddled sky that shook down vertical
Repeated play of fire — no hypogeum
Of wave or rock was good against one hour.

We did not ask for that, but have survived,
And will persist to speak again before
All stubble streets that have not curved
To memory, or known the ominous lifted arm
That lowers down the arc of Helen's brow
To saturate with blessing and dismay.

A goose, tobacco and cologne —
Three-winged and gold-shod prophecies of heave
The lavish heart shall always have to leaven
And spread with bells and voices, and atone
The abating shadows of our conscript dust.

Anchises' navel, dripping of the sea,—
The hands Erasmus dipped in gleaming tides,
Gathered the voltage of blown blood and vine;
Delve upward for the new and scattered wine,
O brother-thief of time, that we recall.
Laugh out the meager penance of their days
Who dare not share with us the breath released,
The substance drilled and spent beyond repair
For golden, or the shadow of gold hair.

Distinctly praise the years, whose volatile
Blamed bleeding hands extend and thresh the heig
The imagination spans beyond despair,
Outpacing bargain, vocable and prayer.

AT MELVILLE'S TOMB

OFTEN beneath the wave, wide from this ledge
The dice of drowned men's bones he saw bequeath
An embassy. Their numbers as he watched,
Beat on the dusty shore and were obscured.

And wrecks passed without sound of bells,
The calyx of death's bounty giving back
A scattered chapter, livid hieroglyph,
The portent wound in corridors of shells.

Then in the circuit calm of one vast coil,
Its lashings charmed and malice reconciled,
Frosted eyes there were that lifted altars;
And silent answers crept across the stars.

Compass, quadrant and sextant contrive
No farther tides . . . High in the azure steeps
Monody shall not wake the mariner.
This fabulous shadow only the sea keeps.

VOYAGES

I

ABOVE the fresh ruffles of the surf
Bright striped urchins flay each other with sand.
They have contrived a conquest for shell shucks,
And their fingers crumble fragments of baked weed
Gaily digging and scattering.

And in answer to their treble interjections
The sun beats lightning on the waves,
The waves fold thunder on the sand;
And could they hear me I would tell them:

O brilliant kids, frisk with your dog,
Fondle your shells and sticks, bleached
By time and the elements; but there is a line
You must not cross nor ever trust beyond it
Spry cordage of your bodies to caresses
Too lichen-faithful from too wide a breast.
The bottom of the sea is cruel.

II

And yet this great wink of eternity,
Of rimless floods, unfettered leewardings,
Samite sheeted and processioned where
Her undinal vast belly moonward bends,
Laughing the wrapt inflections of our love;

Take this Sea, whose diapason knells
On scrolls of silver snowy sentences,
The sceptred terror of whose sessions rends
As her demeanors motion well or ill,
All but the pieties of lovers' hands.

And onward, as bells off San Salvador
Salute the crocus lustres of the stars,
In these poinsettia meadows of her tides,—
Adagios of islands, O my Prodigal,
Complete the dark confessions her veins spell.

Mark how her turning shoulders wind the hours,
And hasten while her penniless rich palms
Pass superscription of bent foam and wave,—
Hasten, while they are true,— sleep, death, desire,
Close round one instant in one floating flower.

Bind us in time, O Seasons clear, and awe.
O minstrel galleons of Carib fire,
Bequeath us to no earthly shore until
Is answered in the vortex of our grave
The seal's wide spindrift gaze toward paradise.

III

INFINITE consanguinity it bears —
This tendered theme of you that light
Retrieves from sea plains where the sky
Resigns a breast that every wave enthrones;
While ribboned water lanes I wind
Are laved and scattered with no stroke
Wide from your side, whereto this hour
The sea lifts, also, reliquary hands.

And so, admitted through black swollen gates
That must arrest all distance otherwise,—
Past whirling pillars and lithe pediments,
Light wrestling there incessantly with light,
Star kissing star through wave on wave unto
Your body rocking!
and where death, if shed,
Presumes no carnage, but this single change,—
Upon the steep floor flung from dawn to dawn
The silken skilled transmemberment of song;

Permit me voyage, love, into your hands . . .

IV

WHOSE counted smile of hours and days, suppose
I know as spectrum of the sea and pledge
Vastly now parting gulf on gulf of wings
Whose circles bridge, I know, (from palms to the severe
Chilled albatross's white immutability)
No stream of greater love advancing now
Than, singing, this mortality alone
Through clay aflow immortally to you.

All fragrance irrefragibly, and claim
Madly meeting logically in this hour
And region that is ours to wreathe again,
Portending eyes and lips and making told
The chancel port and portion of our June —

Shall they not stem and close in our own steps
Bright staves of flowers and quills to-day as I
Must first be lost in fatal tides to tell?
In signature of the incarnate word
The harbor shoulders to resign in mingling
Mutual blood, transpiring as foreknown
And widening noon within your breast for gathering
All bright insinuations that my years have caught

For islands where must lead inviolably
Blue latitudes and levels of your eyes,—

In this expectant, still exclaim receive
The secret oar and petals of all love.

V

METICULOUS, past midnight in clear rime,
Infrangible and lonely, smooth as though cast
Together in one merciless white blade —
The bay estuaries fleck the hard sky limits.

— As if too brittle or too clear to touch!
The cables of our sleep so swiftly filed,
Already hang, shred ends from remembered stars.
One frozen trackless smile . . . What words
Can strangle this deaf moonlight? For we

Are overtaken. Now no cry, no sword
Can fasten or deflect this tidal wedge,
Slow tyranny of moonlight, moonlight loved
And changed . . . "There's

Nothing like this in the world," you say,
Knowing I cannot touch your hand and look
Too, into that godless cleft of sky
Where nothing turns but dead sands flashing.

"— And never to quite understand!" No,
In all the argosy of your bright hair I dreamed
Nothing so flagless as this piracy.

But now
Draw in your head, alone and too tall here.
Your eyes already in the slant of drifting foam;
Your breath sealed by the ghosts I do not know:
Draw in your head and sleep the long way home.

VI

WHERE icy and bright dungeons lift
Of swimmers their lost morning eyes,
And ocean rivers, churning, shift
Green borders under stranger skies,

Steadily as a shell secretes
Its beating leagues of monotone,
Or as many waters trough the sun's
Red kelson past the cape's wet stone;

O rivers mingling toward the sky
And harbor of the phœnix' breast —
My eyes pressed black against the prow,
— Thy derelict and blinded guest

Waiting, afire, what name, unspoke,
I cannot claim: let thy waves rear
More savage than the death of kings,
Some splintered garland for the seer.

Beyond siroccos harvesting
The solstice thunders, crept away,
Like a cliff swinging or a sail
Flung into April's inmost day —

Creation's blithe and petalled word
To the lounged goddess when she rose
Conceding dialogue with eyes
That smile unsearchable repose —

Still fervid covenant, Belle Isle,
— Unfolded floating dais before
Which rainbows twine continual hair —
Belle Isle, white echo of the oar!

The imaged Word, it is, that holds
Hushed willows anchored in its glow.
It is the unbetrayable reply
Whose accent no farewell can know.

THREE · KEY WEST

AN ISLAND SHEAF

The starry floor,
The wat'ry shore,
Is given thee 'til the break of day.

—BLAKE

KEY WEST

HERE has my salient faith annealed me.
Out of the valley, past the ample crib
To skies impartial, that do not disown me
Nor claim me, either, by Adam's spine — nor rib.

The oar plash, and the meteorite's white arch
Concur with wrist and bicep. In the moon
That now has sunk I strike a single march
To heaven or hades — to an equally frugal noon.

Because these millions reap a dead conclusion
Need I presume the same fruit of my bone
As draws them towards a doubly mocked confusion
Of apish nightmares into steel-strung stone?

O, steel and stone! But gold was, scarcity before.
And here is water, and a little wind....
There is no breath of friends and no more shore
Where gold has not been sold and conscience tinned.

O CARIB ISLE!

THE tarantula rattling at the lily's foot
Across the feet of the dead, laid in white sand
Near the coral beach — nor zigzag fiddler crabs
Side-stilting from the path (that shift, subvert
And anagrammatize your name) — No, nothing here
Below the palsy that one eucalyptus lifts
In wrinkled shadows — mourns.

And yet suppose
I count these nacreous frames of tropic death,
Brutal necklaces of shells around each grave
Squared off so carefully. Then

To the white sand I may speak a name, fertile
Albeit in a stranger tongue. Tree names, flower names
Deliberate, gainsay death's brittle crypt. Meanwhile
The wind that knots itself in one great death —
Coils and withdraws. So syllables want breath.

But where is the Captain of the doubloon isle
Without a turnstile? Who but catchword crabs
Patrols the dry groins of the underbrush?
What man, or What

Is Commissioner of the mildew throughout the ambushed
senses?
His Carib mathematics web the eyes' baked lenses!

Under the poinciana, of a noon or afternoon
Let fiery blossoms clot the light, render my ghost
Sieved upward, white and black along the air
Until it meets the blue's comedian host.

Let not the pilgrim see himself again
For slow evisceration bound like those huge terrapin
Each daybreak on the wharf, their brine-caked eyes;
— Spiked, overturned; such thunder in their strain!

Slagged on the hurricane — I, cast within its flow,
Congeal by afternoons here, satin and vacant.
You have given me the shell, Satan,— carbonic amulet
Sere of the sun exploded in the sea.

THE MANGO TREE

LET them return, saying you blush again for the great Great-grandmother. It's all like Christmas.

When you sprouted Paradise a discard of chewing-gum took place. Up jug to musical hanging jug just gay spiders yoked you first,— silking of shadows good underdrawers for owls.

First-plucked before and since the Flood, old hypnotisms wrench the golden boughs. Leaves spatter dawn from emerald cloud-sprockets. Fat final prophets with lean bandits crouch: and dusk is close

under your noon,
you sun-heap, whose

ripe apple-lanterns gush history, recondite lightnings, irised.

O mister Señor
missus Miss
Mademoiselle
with baskets

Maggy, come on

ISLAND QUARRY

SQUARE sheets—they saw the marble into
Flat slabs there at the marble quarry
At the turning of the road around the roots of the mountain
Where the straight road would seem to ply below the stone,
that fierce
Profile of marble spiked with yonder
Palms against the sunset's towering sea, and maybe
Against mankind. It is at times —

In dusk it is at times as though this island lifted, floated
In Indian baths. At Cuban dusk the eyes
Walking the straight road toward thunder —
This dry road silvering toward the shadow of the quarry
— It is at times as though the eyes burned hard and glad
And did not take the goat path quivering to the right,
Wide of the mountain — thence to tears and sleep —
But went on into marble that does not weep.

THE MERMEN

And if
Thy banished trunk be found in our dominions —
— KING LEAR

BUDDHAS and engines serve us undersea;
Though why they bide here, only hell that's sacked
Of every blight and ingenuity —
Can solve.

The Cross alone has flown the wave.
But since the Cross sank, much that's warped and cracked
Has followed in its name, has heaped its grave.
Oh —

Gallows and guillotines to hail the sun
And smoking racks for penance when day's done!
No —

Leave us, you idols of Futurity — alone,
Here where we finger moidores of spent grace
And ponder the bright stains that starred His Throne
— This Cross, agleam still with a human face!

THE IDIOT

SHEER over to the other side,— for see
That boy straggling under those mimosas, daft
With squint lanterns in his head, and it's likely
Fumbling his sex. That's why those children laughed

In such infernal circles round his door
Once when he shouted, stretched in ghastly shape.
I hurried by. But back from the hot shore
Passed him again . . . He was alone, agape;

One hand dealt out a kite string; a tin can
The other tilted, peeled end clapped to eye.
That kite aloft — you should have watched him scan
Its course, though he'd clamped midnight to noon sky!

And since, through these hot barricades of green,
A Dios gracias, graç — I've heard his song
Above all reason lifting, halt serene —
My trespass vision shrinks to face his wrong.

A NAME FOR ALL

MOONMOTH and grasshopper that flee our page
And still wing on, untarnished of the name
We pinion to your bodies to assuage
Our envy of your freedom — we must maim

Because we are usurpers, and chagrined —
And take the wing and scar it in the hand.
Names we have, even, to clap on the wind;
But we must die, as you, to understand.

I dreamed that all men dropped their names, and sang
As only they can praise, who build their days
With fin and hoof, with wing and sweetened fang
Struck free and holy in one Name always.

ROYAL PALM

FOR GRACE HART CRANE

GREEN rustlings, more than regal charities
Drift coolly from that tower of whispered light.
Amid the noontide's blazed asperities
I watched the sun's most gracious anchorite

Climb up as by communings, year on year
Uneaten of the earth or aught earth holds,
And the grey trunk, that's elephantine, rear
Its frondings sighing in ætherial folds.

Forever fruitless, and beyond that yield
Of sweat the jungle presses with hot love
And tendril till our deathward breath is sealed —
It grazes the horizons, launched above

Mortality — ascending emerald-bright,
A fountain at salute, a crown in view —
Unshackled, casual of its azured height
As though it soared suchwise through heaven too.

THE AIR PLANT

GRAND CAYMAN

This tuft that thrives on saline nothingness,
Inverted octopus with heavenward arms
Thrust parching from a palm-bole hard by the cove —
A bird almost — of almost bird alarms,

Is pulmonary to the wind that jars
Its tentacles, horrific in their lurch.
The lizard's throat, held bloated for a fly,
Balloons but warily from this throbbing perch.

The needles and hack-saws of cactus bleed
A milk of earth when stricken off the stalk;
But this,— defenseless, thornless, sheds no blood,
Almost no shadow — but the air's thin talk.

Angelic Dynamo! Ventriloquist of the Blue!
While beachward creeps the shark-swept Spanish Main
By what conjunctions do the winds appoint
Its apotheosis, at last — the hurricane!

IMPERATOR VICTUS

Big guns again
No speakee well
But plain.

Again, again —
And they shall tell
The Spanish Main

The Dollar from the Cross.

Big guns again.
But peace to thee,
Andean brain.

That defunct boss.

Big guns again,
Atahualpa,
Imperator Inca —

Slain.

THE HURRICANE

Lo, Lord, Thou ridest!
Lord, Lord, Thy swifting heart

Naught stayeth, naught now bideth
But's smithereened apart!

Ay! Scripture flee'th stone!
Milk-bright, Thy chisel wind

Rescindeth flesh from bone
To quivering whittlings thinned —

Swept — whistling straw! Battered,
Lord, e'en boulders now out-leap

Rock sockets, levin-lathered!
Nor, Lord, may worm out-deep

Thy drum's gambade, its plunge abscond!
Lord God, while summits crashing

Whip sea-kelp screaming on blond
Sky-seethe, high heaven dashing —

Thou ridest to the door, Lord!
Thou bidest wall nor floor, Lord!

BACARDI SPREADS THE EAGLE'S WINGS

PABLO and Pedro, and black Serafin
Bought a launch last week. It might as well
Have been made of — well, say paraffin,
— That thin and blistered, just a rotten shell.

"Hell! out there among the barracudas
Their engine stalled. No oars, and leaks
Oozing a-plenty. They sat like baking Buddhas.
Luckily the Cayman schooner streaks

"By just in time, and lifts 'em high and dry . . .
They're back now on that mulching job at Pepper's.
— Yes, patent-leather shoes — hot enough to fry
Anyone but these native high-steppers!"

AND BEES OF PARADISE

I HAD come all the way here from the sea,
Yet met the wave again between your arms
Where cliff and citadel — all verily
Dissolved within a sky of beacon forms —

Sea gardens lifted rainbow-wise through eyes
I found.

Yes, tall, inseparably our days
Pass sunward. We have walked the kindled skies
Inexorable and girded with your praise,

By the dove filled, and bees of Paradise.

TO EMILY DICKINSON

You who desired so much — in vain to ask —
Yet fed your hunger like an endless task,
Dared dignify the labor, bless the quest —
Achieved that stillness ultimately best,

Being, of all, least sought for: Emily, hear!
O sweet, dead Silencer, most suddenly clear
When singing that Eternity possessed
And plundered momently in every breast;

— Truly no flower yet withers in your hand,
The harvest you descried and understand
Needs more than wit to gather, love to bind.
Some reconcilement of remotest mind —

Leaves Ormus rubyless, and Ophir chill.
Else tears heap all within one clay-cold hill.

MOMENT FUGUE

THE syphilitic selling violets calmly
and daisies
By the subway news-stand knows
how hyacinths

This April morning offers
hurriedly
In bunches sorted freshly —
and bestows
On every purchaser
(of heaven perhaps)

His eyes —
like crutches hurtled against glass
Fall mute and sudden (dealing change
for lilies)
Beyond the roses that the flesh can pass.

TO THE CLOUD JUGGLER

IN MEMORIAM: HARRY CROSBY

WHAT you may cluster 'round the knees of space
We hold in vision only, asking trace
Of districts where cliff, sea and palm advance
The falling wonder of a rainbow's trance.

Your light lifts whiteness into virgin azure . . .
Disclose your lips, O Sun, nor long demure
With snore of thunder, crowding us to bleed
The green preëmption of the deep seaweed.

You, the rum-giver to that slide-by-night,—
The moon's best lover,— guide us by a sealight
Of quarts to faithfuls — surely smuggled home —
As you raise temples fresh from basking foam.

Expose vaunted validities that yawn
Past pleasantries . . . Assert the ripened dawn
As you have yielded balcony and room
Or tempests — in a silver, floating plume.

Wrap us and lift us; drop us then, returned
Like water, undestroyed,— like mist, unburned . . .
But do not claim a friend like him again,
Whose arrow must have pierced you beyond pain.

BY NILUS ONCE I KNEW...

Some old Egyptian joke is in the air
Dear lady — the poet said — release your hair;
Come, search the marshes for a friendly bed
Or let us bump heads in some lonely shed.

An old Egyptian jest has cramped the tape.
The keyboard no more offers an escape
From the sweet jeopardy of Anthony's plight
You've overruled my typewriter tonight.

Decisive grammar given unto queens,—
An able text, more motion than machines
Have levers for,— stampede it with fresh type
From twenty alphabets — we're still unripe!

This hieroglyph is no dumb, deaf mistake.
It knows it's way through India — tropic shake!
It's Titicaca till we've trod it through
And then it pleads again, "I wish I knew."

TO SHAKESPEARE [1]

THROUGH torrid entrances, past icy poles
A hand moves on the page! Who shall again
Engrave such hazards as thy might controls —
  Conflicting, purposeful yet outcry vain
Of all our days, being pilot,— tempest, too!
  Sheets that mock lust and thorns that scribble hate
Are lifted from torn flesh with human rue,
  And laughter, burnished brighter than our fate,
Thou wieldest with such tears that every faction
  Swears high in Hamlet's throat, and devils throng
Where angels beg for doom in ghast distraction
  And fall, both! Yet thine Ariel holds his song:
And that serenity that Prospero gains
Is justice that has cancelled earthly chains.

[1] *A variation of this poem:*

THE TREE

GREAT WILLIAM

THROUGH torrid entrances, by icy poles
His hand branches the page! who shall again
Command such hazards as that trunk controls.
Strident, yet purposeful, those stresses gain
The surest leaves, He's pilot,— tempest too.
For bolts that shield lust, thorns that scribble hate
He parries, strikes and cancels. Noble rue
With leaved laughter he can bind and mate;

And out of courses challenge desperate faction.
That oath, tempered in Hamlet's throat, is gong
To angels, demons,— both in ghast distraction!
And what of failure — so there's Ariel's song?

The clear serenity that Prospero gains
Is ever acorn in a world of chains.

THE BROKEN TOWER

THE bell-rope that gathers God at dawn
Dispatches me as though I dropped down the knell
Of a spent day — to wander the cathedral lawn
From pit to crucifix, feet chill on steps from hell.

Have you not heard, have you not seen that corps
Of shadows in the tower, whose shoulders sway
Antiphonal carillons launched before
The stars are caught and hived in the sun's ray?

The bells, I say, the bells break down their tower;
And swing I know not where. Their tongues engrave
Membrane through marrow, my long-scattered score
Of broken intervals. . . . And I, their sexton slave!

Oval encyclicals in canyons heaping
The impasse high with choir. Banked voices slain!
Pagodas, campaniles with reveilles outleaping —
O terraced echoes prostrate on the plain! . . .

And so it was I entered the broken world
To trace the visionary company of love, its voice

An instant in the wind (I know not whither hurled)
But not for long to hold each desperate choice.

My word I poured. But was it cognate, scored
Of that tribunal monarch of the air
Whose thigh embronzes earth, strikes crystal Word
In wounds pledged once to hope — cleft to despair?

The steep encroachments of my blood left me
No answer (could blood hold such a lofty tower
As flings the question true?) — or is it she
Whose sweet mortality stirs latent power?—

And through whose pulse I hear, counting the strokes
My veins recall and add, revived and sure
The angelus of wars my chest evokes:
What I hold healed, original now, and pure . . .

And builds, within, a tower that is not stone
(Not stone can jacket heaven) — but slip
Of pebbles — visible wings of silence sown
In azure circles, widening as they dip

The matrix of the heart, lift down the eye
That shrines the quiet lake and swells a tower . . .
The commodious, tall decorum of that sky
Unseals her earth, and lifts love in its shower.

THE PHANTOM BARK

So dream thy sails, O phantom bark
That I thy drownèd man may speak again
Perhaps as once Will Collins spoke the lark,
And leave me half a-dream upon the main.

For who shall lift head up to funnel smoke,
And who trick back the leisured winds again
As they were fought — and wooed? They now but stoke
Their vanity, and dream no land in vain.

Of old there was a promise, and thy sails
Have kept no faith but wind, the cold stream
— The hot fickle wind, the breath of males
Imprisoned never, no not soot or rain.

MARCH

AWAKE to the cold light
of wet wind running
twigs in tremors. Walls
are naked. Twilights raw —
and when the sun taps steeples
their glistenings dwindle
upward . . .

March
slips along the ground
like a mouse under pussy
willows, a little hungry.

The vagrant ghost of winter,
is it this that keeps the chimney
busy still? For something still
nudges shingles and windows:

but waveringly,— this ghost,
this slate-eyed saintly wraith
of winter wanes
and knows its waning.

OLD SONG

THINE absence overflows the rose,—
From every petal gleam
Such words as it were vain to close,
Such tears as crowd the dream

So eyes that mind thee fair and gone,
Bemused at waking, spend
On skies that gild thy remote dawn
More hopes than here attend.

The burden on the rose will fade
Sped in the spectrum's kiss.
But here the thorn in sharpened shade
Weathers all loneliness.

FOUR · UNCOLLECTED POEMS

Of sailors — those two Corsicans at Marseille,—
The Dane at Paris, and those weeks of May
With distance, lizard-like, green as Pernot . . .
This Connecticut rain, its smashing fall, its wet inferno —

Enforces memory — prison, perfume of women, and the
fountain —
Oh, final apple-math of ripe night fallen!
Concluding handclasp, cider, summer-swollen,
Folds, and is folden in the echoing mountain . . .
Yields and is shielded, wrapt in traffic flame.

ENRICH MY RESIGNATION

ENRICH my resignation as I usurp those far
Feints of control — hear rifles blown out on the stag
Below the æroplane — and see the fox's brush
Whisk silently beneath the red hill's crag,
Extinction stirred on either side
Because love wonders, keeps a certain mirth.—

Die, oh, centuries, die, as Dionysus said,
Yet live in all my resignation.
It is the moment, now, when all
The heartstrings spring, unlaced —
Here is the peace of the fathers.

THE SAD INDIAN

SAD heart, the gymnast of inertia, does not count
Hours, days — and scarcely sun and moon —
The warp is in his woof — and his keen vision
Spells what his tongue has had — and only that —
How more?— but the lash, lost vantage and the prison
His fathers took for granted ages since — and so he looms

Farther than his sun-shadow — farther than wings
Their shadows even — now can't carry him.
He does not know the new hum in the sky
And — backwards — is it thus the eagles fly?

THE CIRCUMSTANCE

TO XOCHIPILLI

THE anointed stone, the coruscated crown
The drastic throne, the
Desperate sweet eyepit-basins of a bloody foreign clown —
Couched on bloody basins, floating bone
Of a dismounted people...

If you could buy the stones,
Display the stumbling bones
Urging your unsuspecting
Shins, sus-
Taining nothing in time but more and more of Time
Mercurially might add but would
Subtract and concentrate... If you
Could drink the sun as did and does
Xochipilli — as they who've
Gone have done, as they
Who've done... A god of flowers in statued
Stone...of love —

If you could die, then starve, who live
Thereafter, stronger than death smiles in flowering stone;—

You could stop time, give florescent
Time a longer answer back (shave lightning,
Possess in hale full the winds) of time
A longer answer force, more enduring answer
As they did — and have done...

THE VISIBLE THE UNTRUE

TO E. O.

YES, I being
the terrible puppet of my dreams, shall
lavish this on you —
the dense mine of the orchid, split in two.
And the finger-nails that cinch such
environs?
And what about the staunch neighbor tabulations,
with all their zest for doom?

I'm wearing badges
that cancel all your kindness. Forthright
I watch the silver Zeppelin
destroy the sky. To
stir your confidence?
To rouse your sanctions?

The silver strophe . . . the canto
bright with myth. . . Such
distances leap landward without
evil smile. And, as for me . . .

The window weight throbs in its blind
partition. To extinguish what I have of faith.
Yes, light. And it is always
always, always the eternal rainbow
And it is always the day, the day of unkind farewell.

RELIQUARY

TENDERNESS and resolution!
What is our life without a sudden pillow,
What is death without a ditch?

The harvest laugh of bright Apollo
And the flint tooth of Sagittarius,
Rhyme from the same Tau (closing cinch by cinch)
And pocket us who, somehow, do not follow,
As though we knew those who are variants,
Charms that each by each refuse the clinch
With desperate propriety, whose name is writ
In wider letters than the alphabet,—
Who is now left to vary the Sanscrit
Pillowed by

My wrist in the vestibule of Time?— Who
Will hold it — wear the keepsake, dear, of time —
Return the mirage on a coin that spells
Something of sand and sun the Nile defends?

PURGATORIO

My country, O my land, my friends —
Am I apart — here from you in a land
Where all your gas lights — faces — sputum gleam
Like something left, forsaken — here am I —
And are these stars — the high plateau — the scents
Of Eden — and the dangerous tree — are these
The landscape of confession — and if confession
So absolution? Wake pines — but pines wake here.
I dream the too-keen cider — the too-soft snow.
Where are the bayonets that the scorpion may not grow?
Here quakes of earth make houses fall —
And all my countrymen I see rush toward one stall;
Exile is thus purgatory — not such as Dante built,

But rather like a blanket than a quilt,
And I have no decision — is it green or brown
That I prefer to country or to town?
I am unraveled, umbilical anew,
As ring the church bells here in Mexico —
(They ring too obdurately here to heed my call)
And what hours they forget to chime I'll know,
As one whose altitude at one time, was not so.

HAVANA ROSE

LET us strip the desk for action — now we have a house in Mexico. . . . That night in Vera Cruz — verily for me "the True Cross"— let us remember the Doctor and my thoughts, my humble, fond remembrances of the great bacteriologist. . . . The wind, that night, the clamour of incessant shutters, doors, and the watchman tiptoeing the successive patio balconies trundling with a typical pistol — trying to muffle doors — and the pharos shine — the mid-wind midnight stroke of it, its milk-light regularity above my bath partition through the lofty, dusty glass — *Cortez* — *Cortez* — his crumbled palace in the square — the typhus in a trap, the Doctor's rat trap. Where? Somewhere in Vera Cruz — to bring — to take — to mix — to ransom — to deduct — to cure. . . .

The rats played ring around the rosy (in their basement basinette) — the Doctor supposedly slept, supposedly in #35 — thus in my wakeful watches at least — the lighthouse flashed . . . whirled . . . delayed, and struck — *again, again.* Only the Mayans surely slept — whose references to typhus and whose records spurred the Doctor into something nigh those metaphysics that are typhoid plus and had engaged him once before to death's beyond and back again,— antagonistic wills — into immu-

nity. Tact, horsemanship, courage, were germicides to him....

Poets may not be doctors, but doctors are rare poets when roses leap like rats — and too, when rats make rose nozzles of pink death around white teeth....

And during the wait over dinner at La Diana, the Doctor had said — who was American also —"You cannot heed the negative, so might go on to undeserved doom... must therefore loose yourself within a pattern's mastery that you can conceive, that you can yield to — by which also you win and gain mastery and happiness which is your own from birth."

REPLY

THOU canst read nothing except through appetite,
And here we join eyes in that sanctity
Where brother passes brother without sight,
But finally knows conviviality. . .

Go then, unto thy turning and thy blame.
Seek bliss then, brother, in my moment's shame.
All this that balks delivery through words
Shall come to you through wounds prescribed by swords:

That hate is but the vengeance of a long caress,
And fame is pivotal to shame with every sun
That rises on eternity's long willingness. . .
So sleep, dear brother, in my fame, my shame undone.

A POSTSCRIPT

FRIENDSHIP agony! words came to me
at last shyly. My only final friends —
the wren and thrush, made solid print for me
across dawn's broken arc. No; yes . . . or were they
the audible ransom, ensign of my faith
towards something far, now farther than ever away?

Remember the lavender of that dawn, lilies,
their ribbon miles, beside the railroad ties
as one nears New Orleans, sweet trenches by the train
after the western desert, and the later cattle country;
and other gratuities, like porters, jokes, roses. . .

Dawn's broken arc! the noon's more furbished room!
Yet seldom was there faith in the heart's right kindness.
There were tickets and alarm clocks. There were counters
and schedules;
and a paralytic woman on an island of the Indies,
Antillean fingers counting my pulse, my love forever.

ETERNITY

September — remember!
October — all over.
—BARBADIAN ADAGE

AFTER it was over, though still gusting balefully,
The old woman and I foraged some drier clothes
And left the house, or what was left of it;
Parts of the roof reached Yucatan, I suppose.
She almost — even then — got blown across lots
At the base of the mountain. But the town, the town!

Wires in the streets and Chinamen up and down
With arms in slings, plaster strewn dense with tiles,
And Cuban doctors, troopers, trucks, loose hens. . .
The only building not sagging on its knees,
Fernandez' Hotel, was requisitioned into pens
For cotted Negroes, bandaged to be taken
To Havana on the first boat through. They groaned.

But was there a boat? By the wharf's old site you saw
Two decks unsandwiched, split sixty feet apart
And a funnel high and dry up near the park
Where a frantic peacock rummaged amid heaped cans
No one seemed to be able to get a spark
From the world outside, but some rumor blew
That Havana, not to mention poor Batabanó,
Was halfway under water with fires

For some hours since — all wireless down
Of course, there too.

Back at the erstwhile house
We shoveled and sweated; watched the ogre sun
Blister the mountain, stripped now, bare of palm,
Everything — and lick the grass, as black as patent
Leather, which the rimed white wind had glazed.
Everything gone — or strewn in riddled grace —
Long tropic roots high in the air, like lace.
And somebody's mule steamed, swaying right by the pump,
Good God! as though his sinking carcass there
Were death predestined! You held your nose already
along the roads, begging for buzzards, vultures. . .
The mule stumbled, staggered. I somehow couldn't budge
To lift a stick for pity of his stupor.

For I
Remember still that strange gratuity of horses
— One ours, and one, a stranger, creeping up with dawn
Out of the bamboo brake through howling, sheeted light
When the storm was dying. And Sarah saw them, too —
Sobbed. Yes, now — it's almost over. For they know;
The weather's in their noses. There's Don — but that one,
white
— I can't account for him! And true, he stood
Like a vast phantom maned by all that memoried night
Of screaming rain — Eternity!

Yet water, water!
I beat the dazed mule toward the road. He got that far
And fell dead or dying, but it didn't so much matter.

The morrow's dawn was dense with carrion hazes
Sliding everywhere. Bodies were rushed into graves
Without ceremony, while hammers pattered in town.
The roads were being cleared, injured brought in
And treated, it seemed. In due time
The President sent down a battleship that baked
Something like two thousand loaves on the way.
Doctors shot ahead from the deck in planes.
The fever was checked. I stood a long time in Mack's talking
New York with the gobs, Guantanamo, Norfolk,—
Drinking Bacardi and talking U.S.A.

THE sea raised up a campanile... The wind I heard
Of brine partaking, whirling spout in shower
Of column kiss — that breakers spouted, sheared
Back into bosom — me — her, into natal power...

APPENDIX A.

EARLY POEMS

NOTE

HART CRANE began to write verse in his fourteenth year. When he prepared his first collection, *White Buildings*, in 1926, he rejected a large mass of poems composed before he was twenty; and destroyed the manuscripts. A few of these early efforts had, however, been published in magazines, such as *The Pagan, The Modern School, The Modernist, S4N, The Measure;* and were thus saved for the student of the evolution of Crane's style. His first published verse appeared in *Bruno's Bohemia*, when he was fifteen. The majority of the poems here reproduced are from *The Pagan.* They are printed as an appendix, in order to preserve the fact of their rejection by the poet.

—EDITOR

THE HIVE

Up the chasm-walls of my bleeding heart
Humanity pecks, claws, sobs and climbs;
Up the inside, and over every part
Of the hive of the world that is my heart.

And of all the sowing, and all the tear-tendering,
And reaping, have mercy and love issued forth;
Mercy, white milk, and honey, gold love —
And I watch, and say, "These the anguish are worth."

1917

ANNUNCIATIONS

THE anxious milk-blood in the veins of the earth,
That strives long and quiet to sever the girth
Of greenery. . . . Below the roots, a quickening shiver
Aroused by some light that had sensed,— ere the shiver
Of the first moth's descent,— day's predestiny. . .
The sand of a dove's flight waved over the lawn. . .
The moan of travail in one dearest beside me. . .
Then high cries from great chasms of chaos withdrawn—
Hush! these things were all heard before dawn.

1917

THE BATHERS

Two ivory women by a milky sea;—
The dawn, a shell's pale lining restlessly
Shimmering over a black mountain-spear:—
A dreamer might see these, and wake to hear
But there is no sound — not even a bird-note;
Only simple ripples flaunt, and stroke, and float,—
Flat lily petals to the sea's white throat.

They say that Venus shot through foam to light,
But they are wrong. . . . Ere man was given sight
She came in such still water, and so nursed
In Silence, beauty blessed and beauty cursed.

1917

THOUGH I have touched her flesh of moons,
Still she sits gestureless and mute,
Drowning cool pearls in alcohol.
O blameless shyness;— innocence dissolute!

She hazards jet; wears tiger-lilies;—
And bolts herself within a jewelled belt.
Too many palms have grazed her shoulders:
Surely she must have felt.

Ophelia had such eyes; but she
Even, sank in love and choked with flowers.
This burns and is not burnt. . . . My modern love were
Charred at a stake in younger times than ours.

1918

CARRIER LETTER

My hands have not touched water since your hands,—
No;— nor my lips freed laughter since "farewell."
And with the day, distance again expands
Between us, voiceless as an uncoiled shell.

Yet,— much follows, much endures... Trust birds alone:
A dove's wings clung about my heart last night
With surging gentleness; and the blue stone
Set in your tryst-ring has but worn more bright.

1918

INDIAN-summer-sun
With crimson feathers whips away the mists,—
Dives through the filter of trellises
And gilds the silver on the blotched arbor-seats.

Now gold and purple scintillate
On trees that seem dancing
In delirium;
Then the moon
In a mad orange flare
Floods the grape-hung night.

1918

FEAR

The host, he says that all is well
And the fire-wood glow is bright;
The food has a warm and tempting smell,—
But on the window licks the night.

Pile on the logs.... Give me your hands,
Friends! No,— it is not fright....
But hold me ... somewhere I heard demands....
And on the window licks the night.

1918

POSTSCRIPT

THOUGH now but marble are the marble urns,
Though fountains droop in waning light, and pain
Glitters on the edges of wet ferns,
I should not dare to let you in again.

Mine is a world foregone though not yet ended,—
An imagined garden grey with sundered boughs
And broken branches, wistful and unmended,
And mist that is more constant than your vows.

1918

TO POTAPOVITCH

(OF THE BALLET RUSSE)

VAULT on the opal carpet of the sun,
Barbaric Prince Igor:— or, blind Pierrot,
Despair until the moon by tears be won;—
Or, Daphnis, move among the bees with Chloe.

Release,— dismiss the passion from your arms.
More real than life, the gestures you have spun
Haunt the blank stage with lingering alarms,
Though silent as your sandals, danced undone.

1919

FORGETFULNESS

Forgetfulness is like a song
That, freed from beat and measure, wanders.
Forgetfulness is like a bird whose wings are reconciled,
Outspread and motionless —
A bird that coasts the wind unwearyingly.

Forgetfulness is rain at night,
Or an old house in a forest,— or a child.
Forgetfulness is white,—
White as a blasted tree,
And it may stun the sybil into prophecy,
Or bury the Gods.

I can remember much forgetfulness.

1919

APPENDIX B.

MODERN POETRY: AN ESSAY

"MODERN POETRY"[1]

MODERN poetry has long since passed the crest of its rebellion against many of the so-called classical strictures. Indeed the primary departures of the early intransigeants were often more in a classic direction, with respect to certain neglected early European traditions, than were many of the Victorian regulations that formed the immediate butt of attack.

Revolution flourishes still, but rather as a contemporary tradition in which the original obstacles to freedom have been, if not always eradicated, at least obscured by floods of later experimentation. Indeed, to the serious artist, revolution as an all-engrossing program no longer exists. It persists at a rapid momentum in certain groups or movements, but often in forms which are more constricting than liberation, in view of a generous choice of subject matter.

The poet's concern must be, as always, self-discipline toward a formal integration of experience. For poetry is an architectural art, based not on Evolution or the idea of progress, but on the articulation of the contemporary human consciousness *sub specie æternitatis*, and inclusive of

[1] This essay was written by Hart Crane for Oliver M. Sayler's Symposium, "Revolt in the Arts" (Brentano's, 1929), and is reproduced by permission of Mr. Sayler and of the Publishers. EDITOR.

all readjustments incident to science and other shifting factors related to that consciousness. The key to the process of free creative activity which Coleridge gave us in his "Lectures on Shakespeare" exposes the responsibilities of every poet, modern or ancient, and cannot be improved upon. "No work of true genius," he says, "dares want its appropriate form, neither indeed is there any danger of this. As it must not, so genius cannot, be lawless: for it is even this that constitutes its genius — *the power of acting creatively under laws of its own origination.*"

Poetry has at once a greater intimacy and a wider, more exact scope of implication than painting or any of the other arts. It is therefore more apt to be indicative of impending changes in other media such as painting or music. This is a logical deduction that facts do not always favor, as in the case of some modern composers such as Stravinsky, the full purport of whose inspiration seems to lie beyond the reach of current literary expression. Literature has a more tangible relationship to painting; and it is highly probable that the Symbolist movement in French poetry was a considerable factor in the instigation first, of Impressionism, and later, of Cubism. Both arts have had parallel and somewhat analogous tendencies toward abstract statement and metaphysical representation. In this recent preoccupation it is certain that both media were responding to the shifting emphasis of the Western World away from religion toward science. Analysis and discovery, the two basic concerns of science, became conscious objectives of both painter and poet. A great deal of modern painting is as independent of any representational motive

as a mathematical equation; while some of the most intense and eloquent current verse derives sheerly from acute psychological analysis, quite independent of any dramatic motivation.

The function of poetry in a Machine Age is identical to its function in any other age; and its capacities for presenting the most complete synthesis of human values remain essentially immune from any of the so-called inroads of science. The emotional stimulus of machinery is on an entirely different psychic plane from that of poetry. Its only menace lies in its capacities for facile entertainment, so easily accessible as to arrest the development of any but the most negligible esthetic responses. The ultimate influence of machinery in this respect remains to be seen, but its firm entrenchment in our lives has already produced a series of challenging new responsibilities for the poet.

For unless poetry can absorb the machine, i.e., *acclimatize* it as naturally and casually as trees, cattle, galleons, castles and all other human associations of the past, then poetry has failed of its full contemporary function. This process does not infer any program of lyrical pandering to the taste of those obsessed by the importance of machinery; nor does it essentially involve even the specific mention of a single mechanical contrivance. It demands, however, along with the traditional qualifications of the poet, an extraordinary capacity for surrender, at least temporarily, to the sensations of urban life. This presupposes, of course, that the poet possesses sufficient spontaneity and gusto to convert this experience into positive terms. Machinery will tend to lose its sensational glamour and appear in

its true subsidiary order in human life as use and continual poetic allusion subdue its novelty. For, contrary to general prejudice, the wonderment experienced in watching nose dives is of less immediate creative promise to poetry than the familiar gesture of a motorist in the modest act of shifting gears. I mean to say that mere romantic speculation on the power and beauty of machinery keeps it at a continual remove; it cannot act creatively in our lives until, like the unconscious nervous responses of our bodies, its connotations emanate from within — forming as spontaneous a terminology of poetic reference as the bucolic world of pasture, plow and barn.

The familiar contention that science is inimical to poetry is no more tenable than the kindred notion that theology has been proverbially hostile — with the "Commedia" of Dante to prove the contrary. That "truth" which science pursues is radically different from the metaphorical, extra-logical "truth" of the poet. When Blake wrote that "a tear is an intellectual thing, And a sigh is the sword of an Angel King"— he was not in any logical conflict with the principles of the Newtonian Universe. Similarly, poetic prophecy in the case of the seer has nothing to do with factual prediction or with futurity. It is a peculiar type of perception, capable of apprehending some absolute and timeless concept of the imagination with astounding clarity and conviction.

That the modern poet can profitably assume the rôles of philosopher or theologian is questionable at best. Science, the uncanonized Deity of the times, seems to have automatically displaced the hierarchies of both Academy

and Church. It is pertinent to cite the authors of the "Commedia" and "Paradise Lost" as poets whose verse survives the religious dogmas and philosophies of their respective periods, but it is fallacious to assume that either of these poets could have written important religious verse without the fully developed and articulated religious dogmas that each was heir to.

The future of American poetry is too complicated a speculation to be more than approached in this limited space. Involved in it are the host of considerations relative to the comparative influences of science, machinery and other factors which I have merely touched upon;—besides those influential traditions of early English prosody which form points of departure, at least, for any indigenous rhythms and forms which may emerge. The most typical and valid expression of the American *psychosis* seems to me still to be found in Whitman. His faults as a technician and his clumsy and indiscriminate enthusiasm are somewhat beside the point. He, better than any other, was able to coördinate those forces in America which seem most intractable, fusing them into a universal vision which takes on additional significance as time goes on. He was a revolutionist beyond the strict meaning of Coleridge's definition of genius, but his bequest is still to be realized in all its implications.